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JESUS AND THE CHILDREN

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(See page 185)

Frontispiece

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HE LEADETH ME

A Book of Bible Stories

Stories Told by

DOROTHY O. BARKER

Pictures by

CICELY M. BARKER

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TO THE READER

The publishers present this volume as the outcome of an ideal collaboration. Miss Dorothy O. Barker tells the Bible stories with sympathy and deftness. The illustrations in Colour and Line are the work of her sister, Miss Cicely M. Barker, so well known for her beautiful pictures in *The Children's Book of Hymns*, *The Book of the Flower Fairies*, &c.

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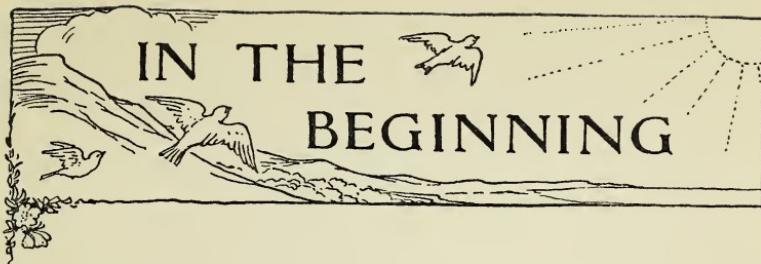
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In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth. He made the sun to shine by day, and the moon and stars by night. He made the great and wide sea, and the fish that live in it. He made the grass, the trees, and every flower that grows upon the earth. He made the tiniest insects, the animals, small and great, and birds of every colour and size.

All these wonderful living things were carefully planned, beautifully made, and perfect of their kind, for "God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good".

God made rules which we call the Laws of Nature to govern all the world, so that while the earth lasts day will always follow night, the moon will make her monthly journey round the earth, the earth will travel round the sun once a year so that the Seasons will follow one another in their appointed order; and all the flowers will be renewed each year by means of their own seeds.

The birds, beasts, and fishes received a gift from God called Instinct, which tells them how to make homes for their young ones, where to find their food, and how to keep themselves and their little ones safe from harm.

It was into this world that God put man to live, and gave him everything for his happiness—plenty of work to do, lovely things to look at, and many wonders to discover.

But God gave man even greater gifts than these. He gave man a Spirit which would live for ever, and by means of which he could speak to God, and God could speak to him; and he gave man Freewill, by which he could choose between right and wrong—his own wishes or God's will.

God's great plan was that while men and women lived on the earth they should learn gradually to know their Father God, to worship him, and to love him, until at last they should be ready to go to the Heavenly Home which was being prepared for them.

How happy everyone should have been in this wonderful world!

But where can all the trouble have come from which we see around us to-day? Surely God did not make war, and cruelty, and illness, and unhappiness?

No, the trouble all came from an evil spirit called Satan, who was able to put sinful and discontented thoughts into men's minds.

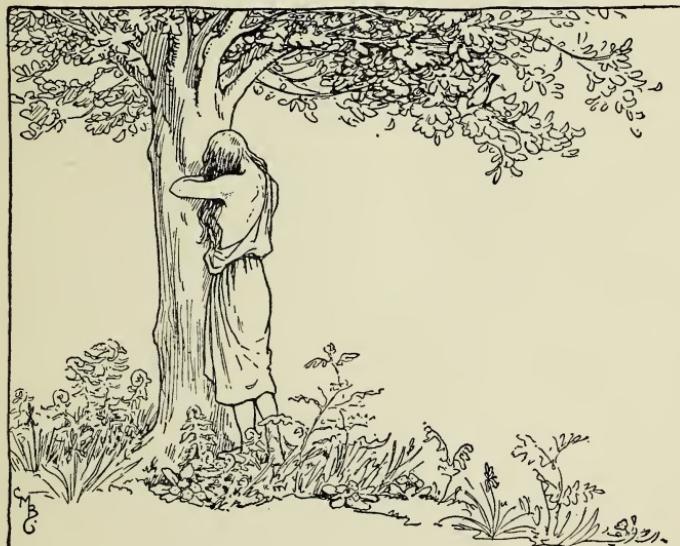
Men and women soon began to think that their own way might be pleasanter than God's way. They were quite free to choose either good or evil, and they chose the evil way.

How sorry God must have been when he saw men and women, and children too, beginning to hate one another, and fight one another, and do every wicked

thing that Satan put into their minds. They began to be afraid of God, too, and no longer wanted to speak with him. They felt as though their sins had built up a great wall which separated them from him.

Then God in his great love for these unhappy, disobedient people, thought of a way to help them.

He looked upon the world to find one man who still loved him, and whom he could separate from the rest of the sinful people. This one man was to be the father of a great family which would grow up knowing and loving God, and they would help to lead the world back to goodness again.



The Call of Abraham

Many years had passed since sin first came into the world and separated men from God who made them. And yet men and women always knew that there must be some power greater than themselves which they could worship.

Sometimes they thought this power was the Sun, sometimes the Moon, or Stars, or Thunder ; sometimes they made an image of wood and called that a god. Then they would make a pile of stones called an altar, and burn a lamb or a kid as a sacrifice, to please their god.

In Ur of the Chaldees the people thought the moon was a god; they built a great temple in her honour and worshipped her there.

Abraham and his brothers were born in Ur. They owned large flocks of sheep and herds of cattle, and often had to move from place to place to find fresh pasture for their animals.

Abraham worshipped the moon with the people of Ur, but he also knew that somewhere there must be a greater God, the God who had made the moon —only he knew so little about this God, far less than even a child knows now.

Then when Abraham was seventy-five years old, God spoke to him.

And what a strange command God gave to the

old man. "Get up and leave your country and your own people, and go into a land which I shall show you; and I will make your name to be long remembered, and you shall be a blessing to all the families on the earth."

Abraham knew at once that it was the voice of the true God, so he made preparation for his journey. He took with him his wife Sarah, Lot, his brother's son, for he had no child of his own—he took his flocks and herds and men to look after them, and his tents and other possessions all packed on to camels.

This great company, led by Abraham, started towards the south, and came to the land of Canaan.

Here Abraham built an altar, and made a sacrifice to God. He knew no better way of showing honour and love to the God who had brought him safely on his journey.

To his satisfaction God spoke to him again, and said: "This land on which you stand shall belong to your family in the years to come. You shall be the father of a great nation, which shall be a blessing to all the world."

So Abraham and Lot pitched their tents and stayed in the land of Canaan.

After a time grass began to be scarce, and there were disputes between Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen about the moving of the sheep on to fresh pasture. Abraham said that it was a pity for two men of one family to quarrel over so small a matter, and it was decided that they should not live together any more.

"Look to the right and to the left," said Abraham kindly to his nephew, "and choose which way you will go."

Lot saw that towards the east were green grassy plains through which the river Jordan flowed, so he took his flocks and his tents and went to live in the Plain of Jordan.

The years went by until Abraham was nearly a hundred years old.

As he sat at his tent door in the day time, or watched the starry sky at night, he often used to think of God's promise, and wonder in what way his family would be a blessing to all men. It pleased him to think that his name would be remembered in the years to come. He could picture young men telling their sons, and old men telling their grandsons, of the great God who had brought their forefather from the Moon-worshippers of Ur into this land of Canaan; he liked to think of them speaking of him with reverence, and calling him Father Abraham.

Then the poor old man would begin to wonder. How could God give this land to his children if he had no child at all? Was it likely that God would send him a baby now that he was so old?

One night when Abraham was sleeping in his tent, God spoke to him yet again, and said: "Fear not, Abraham, you and your wife Sarah shall have a son. Look at the stars in the sky, you cannot tell the number of them, but even so great a number shall your family be. They shall possess this land, and through them I will bless all mankind."

So Abraham did not doubt God any more, but he and Sarah waited patiently for the child to come.

And the next year God's promise came true. How proud and happy were Abraham and Sarah when their baby boy was born. They called him Isaac, and Abraham loved him more than anyone else in the world. Abraham loved God too for having given him a son to comfort his old age.



Ishmael

There was great merry-making in the tents of Abraham. All the servants, men and maids, were feasting with their old master and his wife Sarah, because his baby son was now two years old.

Ishmael, a big boy of fourteen years, and his mother Hagar, were among the happy company; but they alone were not rejoicing at the birth of little Isaac. They were not glad that God had heard the prayers which Abraham had prayed for so many years, and sent a baby boy to comfort him in his old age.

Hagar was watching Abraham with dark and sorrowful eyes, thinking of the happy days when her boy Ishmael had been treated like a favourite son. She knew that Isaac would take the first place now. Isaac would own the tents and flocks, the silver and gold which Abraham had; and above all he would receive the blessings which God had promised to the son of Abraham. And what would become of Ishmael?

Though the light was dim in the big sheep-skin tent, Sarah could see Hagar's gloomy looks and Ishmael's scornful smile, and she knew what was in their thoughts.

"Send away that bond-woman and her son," she said angrily to Abraham that evening. "I will not have that boy here, laughing at me because God has

sent me a baby in my old age! He shall not live any longer in our tents with my little Isaac!"

Now Abraham loved Ishmael, and these words made him very sad. It would be a hard task to tell Hagar that she must make ready to go away for ever.

Poor Hagar had nowhere to go; many years before, she had come from Egypt as maid to Sarah, and she had no home in the land of Canaan to which she could take her boy.

Very early the next morning Ishmael and his mother crept quietly out of their tent, thinking to slip away before anyone else was awake. But someone was astir as early as they were—Abraham was looking out for them. He gave Hagar a goat-skin bag of water and some bread, then after blessing them he watched them wander away out of his sight.

On and on they went, sometimes stopping under the shade of a tree to rest, and drink some of their water; then going on again, until having walked a long way, they reached a desolate place called the Wilderness of Beersheba. The water in their goat-skin was all gone, there was no well or pool in sight, and Ishmael was more tired and thirsty than he had ever been in his life. At last he felt that he could not walk another step unless he could get a drink of water.

Hagar was in despair. Bare, dry sand stretched away as far as she could see; there was no longer any tree to shelter them from the burning sun, but she laid Ishmael in the shade of a little bush, and throwing herself on the scorching ground a short distance from

him, she wept bitterly, feeling sure that her boy was dying, and she could do nothing to help him.

While Ishmael lay on the hot dry sand, he thought of kind old Abraham, and of the prayers that Abraham had taught him to say at sun-rise and sun-set. Ishmael had learnt from Abraham about the God who made the world and the stars, and who took care of his people when they prayed to Him.

Would this good God hear him if he prayed here in the wilderness? Yes, surely He would, for this same sun which He had made was shining here as well as over the tents of Abraham. God could not be so very far away.

So Ishmael prayed. He asked God for the thing he wanted most of all—for water.

God heard Ishmael's prayer, and God spoke to the heart of Hagar, telling her to look again and she would find water. Hagar heard the voice, an angel's voice it seemed to her, and she got up at once and looked around her.

There, to her joy, was a little spring of clear water bubbling and trickling among some stones. How foolish of her not to have noticed it before! She ran and filled the goat-skin, and gave Ishmael a drink of the lovely refreshing water.

From that time all went well with Ishmael and his mother. The boy made a bow and arrows and learnt to be a skilful archer. They settled in Paran, which became the home of his family for many generations. There is still a tribe of wandering Arabs who look back to Ishmael as their forefather.

Abraham's Sacrifice

Isaac grew from a baby to a strong lad, and was the pride and joy of his parents.

What a pleasure it was to Abraham to sit at the tent door with his son, and tell stories of the past, as all old men love to do.

He told Isaac of the days when he lived among the Moon-worshippers at Ur, he told of the journey into the land of Canaan at God's command, and of the wonderful promise that a great nation should grow up, with himself as its father.

Isaac learnt all that Abraham could tell him about God, and sometimes watched an offering being burnt on an altar. Isaac saw that it was always one of the best of the lambs which was chosen for such a solemn purpose.

But Abraham himself was not satisfied with the offerings which he made to God. He felt that they did not really show all the love which was in his heart, he wished he had something better to offer. He would like to give his greatest treasure to God.

Then the voice of God spoke to Abraham's heart.

"Take now thy son, thine only son whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

Yes, Isaac was his greatest treasure; he loved his boy better than anything else in the world.

Could he give up his only son?

Truly it was a severe test for Abraham's love, but without hesitation he made his decision—he would offer his only son as a sacrifice to God.

That is why two figures were slowly trudging up the side of Mount Moriah in the soft morning light; Abraham carrying fire in a brazier, the boy with a bundle of wood on his shoulder.

The mists soon hid them from the two men-servants who were left at the foot of the Mount with the ass, awaiting their master's return, and Abraham and Isaac were alone with God on the rocky mountain side.

To Isaac the three-days' journey had been full of interest, and he walked by his father's side, never dreaming of the part he was to take in the sacrifice. A burnt offering must have seemed a mysterious thing to him, a strange way to worship a God whom they could not see.

Then as they tramped up the steep slope, a thought came to Isaac: "Father," he said, "we have brought the wood and the fire for the burnt offering, but where is the lamb?"

How could the poor old father answer such a question; how could he tell the boy that *he* was to be the lamb? No, he could not tell him yet. "My son," he replied, "God will provide a lamb," and Isaac, quite content, walked on in silence.

Abraham piled up big stones for an altar and

placed the wood upon it. No one knows in what words he told his boy that he was to be the gift of love to God, but Isaac bravely allowed himself to be laid upon the altar.

The old man was just taking up his knife in a trembling hand when a voice sounded through the solemn stillness, "Abraham, Abraham!"

Was it an angel, or was it God himself?

"Do not hurt the lad," said the voice, "you have shown how much you love God by offering your son, your only son, to Him. Therefore God will bless you as He has promised, and through you He will bless all the nations upon earth."

Then Abraham understood that God was pleased with the offering, but was so loving and merciful that He had given him back his treasure, his much loved son. And God had also provided a lamb for the sacrifice, for there, close by the altar, was a ram caught by its horns in a thorn bush.

With joy and thanksgiving Abraham offered the ram to God, then turned to rejoin the waiting servants, and go home with his heart full of love and gratitude, and his only son beside him.

Isaac and Rebekah

Abraham and Eliezer, his most trusted servant, were sitting in the tent talking earnestly. "The boy has been sad and lonely since his mother died, he needs a woman to comfort him—I want to see him happily married, and I wish you to go and choose him a wife."

The old servant listened attentively, and his master went on: "My son Isaac must not marry one of the women of Canaan, they do not know the true God. You must go to Haran, the city of my brother Nahor, and there find a wife among my kinsfolk."

The difficulties of this task came before Eliezer. "Perhaps the woman that I choose will not come with me," he said; "shall I not fetch your son and let him choose a wife for himself?"

"The Lord God who brought me from Ur of the Chaldees unto this country has promised to give this land of Canaan to my children," said Abraham solemnly, "therefore you must promise me never to take my son away from it."

So the servant gave his promise, and prepared for his journey.

He started off with ten camels laden with jewels of gold and silver, and costly garments, as presents for the girl whom he would choose and for her parents; and he arrived at last outside the gates of the city of Nahor.

Near the city gate was a well, and Eliezer knew

that girls from the city were likely to come and draw water there in the evening. So this would be a good place for him to wait and see them.

As he waited he began to wonder again how an old man like himself could possibly make the right choice. "I must ask the God of Abraham to help me," he thought; and kneeling down by the well he prayed:

"O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, send me I pray thee, good speed this day, and let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shall say, 'Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink,' and she shall say, 'Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also,' let the same be she that thou hast chosen for thy servant Isaac."

The prayer was scarcely ended when out of the city gates came some girls with empty pitchers on their shoulders.

The first one to reach the well was a pretty girl called Rebekah; Abraham's servant went up to her, and watched her fill her pitcher, then he said, "Give me to drink, I pray thee, a little water from thy pitcher."

At once she lifted the heavy pitcher from her shoulder, "Drink, my lord," she said. While he drank, the girl looked beyond him towards his ten camels which were kneeling down to rest after their long journey, and a kind thought came to her—can the thought have come from God himself?

"Your camels look tired," she said, "I will draw water for them too."

What welcome words! The old servant looked on with wonder and delight while Rebekah made many

journeys from the well to the trough, pouring out water for the thirsty camels.

Then with eager fingers he opened one of his bundles, and took out two gold bracelets and a gold ring, and gave them to the girl, saying: "Tell me, whose daughter art thou—and is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge to-night?"

"I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor," she replied, "and we have plenty of room for you and your camels. Wait here, and I will tell my father that you have come."

Rebekah ran home in great excitement to tell of the man at the well, and to show the lovely presents he had given her.

In a short time Rebekah's brother, Laban, was sent out to the well to fetch Eliezer. "Come in," he said, "you are welcome. We have prepared a lodging for you and your camel-drivers, also plenty of straw and provender for your camels."

When they reached the house the old servant found a meal ready for him, but he would not touch any food until he had told his story.

"I am Abraham's servant," he said, "and I have come to choose a wife for my master's only son Isaac." Eliezer then told Rebekah's parents and her brother all the history of Abraham since he left Haran; he told them that Isaac now possessed all his father's wealth, and his flocks and herds; he even told of his prayer to God by the well of Haran; and he unpacked the presents that he had brought.

When the story was finished, Bethuel said to Laban:



ABRAHAM AND ISAAC ON MOUNT MORIAH

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"I see plainly that the hand of God is guiding this matter. I can do nothing else but let my daughter go."

Eliezer wished to start on his homeward journey the next morning, but Rebekah's parents tried to persuade him to stay a while, perhaps ten days, before taking her away. "Do not hinder me," he said, "my master will be anxious to know how my journey has prospered."

So Rebekah was called and asked whether she was willing to go with Eliezer that very day.

"I will go," she replied.

The preparations were quickly made. Rebekah's parents and brother soon saw her mounted on one of Abraham's camels, with her nurse, who was to accompany her, on another, and with many blessings and good wishes they watched her ride slowly away to her new home.

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The long journey was nearly over; Abraham's tents were in sight.

"Who is that coming to meet us?" asked Rebekah, pointing to a figure seen dimly in the evening light.

"Why, that is my young master Isaac," replied Eliezer.

Rebekah dismounted quickly from her camel and covered her face with a veil, as was the custom for a bride in that country.

Isaac met the party, and soon heard all that Eliezer had to tell. Then he led Rebekah into his mother's tent, which had been prepared for her. As soon as he saw her face he loved her, and they lived happily together for many years.

Jacob and Esau

Jacob was thoughtfully stirring a pot of red lentil soup over a fire—he had much to think of. His father Isaac was getting old, and the time must be drawing near when his possessions would be divided between his two sons, the elder getting a double share.

But this was not all. Jacob knew that his father would give the elder son a special blessing, and would pass on to him the promise which God had made to Abraham—and Esau, not Jacob, was the elder son.

Esau was a clever archer. He cared very little for his father's blessing, or for God's promise; he was satisfied if he had a good day's hunting, and a savoury meal when he came in tired and hungry.

How Jacob wished that *he* were the elder son! How grand it would be if *his* were the family blessed by God, so that it might bring a blessing to all the world!

But Esau was the elder, and these great things were his Birthright, whether he wanted them or not.

Jacob's thoughts were interrupted by the sound of Esau's footsteps, returning from the fields; and Esau's voice calling: “ Give me some of that soup, I pray you, for I am fainting with hunger!”

“ First you must give up your Birthright to me,” replied Jacob quickly; “ promise me that I shall have the elder son's blessing, and you shall have the soup.”

"What good will the Birthright be to me if I die of hunger?" said Esau.

"Give me your promise," insisted Jacob. So in exchange for a bowl of soup, Esau gave up his right.

Years went by, until the two brothers were grown men. Esau was married, and their father so old, and so nearly blind, that he could not distinguish his sons' faces; he knew them apart by their voices. He used to touch them too, and he knew the strong hairy arms and hands of his favourite son Esau.

One day the old man called Esau: "My son," he said, "take your bow and arrows, go out and get me venison. Cook a savoury meal for me such as I love, then I will give you my blessing before I die."

These words were overheard by Rebekah, and as soon as she had seen Esau stride away across the fields, she called to her favourite son Jacob and told him what Isaac had said. "Now, my son, obey my voice," she said, "and fetch me two kids from the flock, which I can make into a savoury dish such as your father loves. Then you shall take it to him, and you will get the elder son's blessing."

Could his wife and son bear to play such a trick on the blind old man? Yes, they did not stop to think of Isaac's feelings, or whether God would approve. Jacob had bought the Birthright from Esau with a bowl of soup, and it seemed as though Esau would get the blessing after all. Something must be done quickly to prevent this. Jacob's only fear was that his father would recognize him.

"Esau is a hairy man," he said, "father will feel the smoothness of my hands."

"Only trust me," replied his mother, "and bring me the kids."

When the meat was ready, Rebekah called Jacob, made him put on a coat belonging to Esau, tied pieces of hairy goat skin on his arms and hands, and sent him thus prepared into his father's tent.

"Who art thou?" asked the old man, as he heard footsteps approaching, and smelt the savoury meat.

"I am thy first-born son Esau," replied Jacob, "and I have brought you this venison that you love, so that you may eat it, and give me your blessing."

"How is it that you are back so quickly?" asked Isaac.

"Because the Lord thy God sent me good speed," answered Jacob, adding lie upon lie.

But Isaac was not quite satisfied. "Come near me, my son," he said, stretching out his hands.

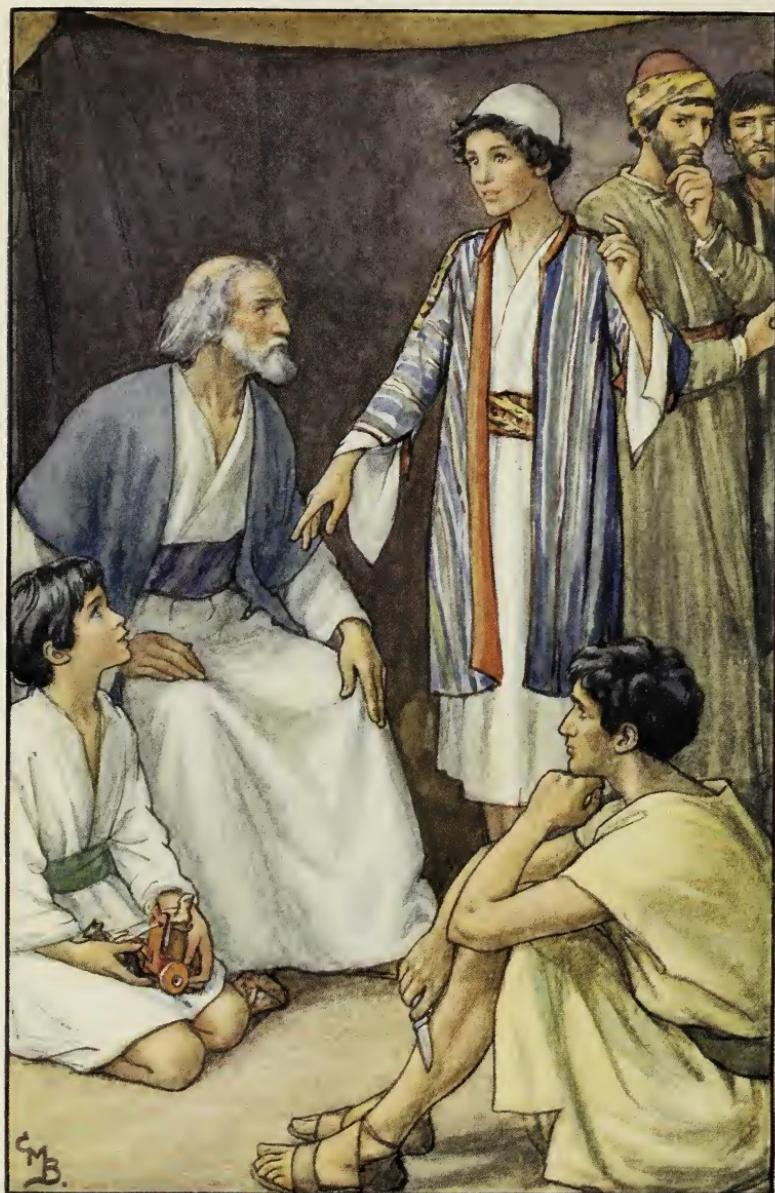
"The voice is the voice of Jacob," he murmured, "but these are Esau's hairy hands, and the coat is Esau's, it smells of the fields."

So Isaac dined from the meat and wine that Jacob had brought, and then gave him the wished-for blessing.

"May God bless you with plenty of corn and wine. May nations bow down to you; and may you be lord over your brother."

No sooner had Jacob left the tent than Esau returned from the fields.

"Who art thou?" asked the old man again, as he heard Esau's footsteps.



THE DREAMER

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"I am thy first-born son Esau," replied the young man, "and I have brought you this savoury meat, so that you may eat it and give me your blessing."

Old Isaac began to tremble as he heard these words. "Who is it," he cried, "who has come before you, and brought venison, and taken the blessing?"

"My brother Jacob took away my Birthright, and now he has robbed me of my blessing!" exclaimed Esau bitterly, "but have you only one blessing? Bless me, even me also, oh my father!"

And Esau wept for the blessing which he began to value when he knew that it could not be his.

"Behold, I have made your brother lord over you, and blessed him with corn and wine," said Isaac, "so your dwelling shall be far from the land which the Lord has blessed with plenty; you shall live by your sword, and shall serve your brother."

Esau left Isaac's tent with anger in his heart, and his mind made up to kill his brother.

When his mother saw him, she guessed his thoughts, and feared for the life of her favourite Jacob.

"Obey my voice, Jacob," she entreated, "and rise up quickly. Go to Haran, there you will find my brother Laban. Stay with him for a few days, until your brother's anger has passed."

So Jacob, finding that it was the wish of both his parents that he should go, received a last blessing from his father, and a suggestion that he should choose a wife for himself in Haran, and started on his lonely journey without seeing his brother again.

Jacob and Rachel

Darkness fell upon the land of Canaan. The stars looked down from the deep blue sky on to the quiet sleeping country, the peaceful sheep in their folds, the cattle under the trees, the dark groups of goat-skin tents, and the little flat-roofed houses of the Canaanites.

In a lonely part of the country, near the city of Luz, lay a young man, quite alone, sleeping soundly, with his head resting on a big stone.

It was Jacob. He was a long way from home; he had started in great haste, for fear his brother Esau would pursue him and kill him; and now he was tired out.

Jacob was lonely and unhappy too. He had never left his home before, and he did not know how he would be received by his uncle Laban, who lived in Haran, and whom he had never seen. But the worst trouble was the thought that he had deceived his old father, and played a mean trick on his brother. How could a good God bless a man who had behaved like that? He must not expect a blessing from God now—he did not deserve it!

It was with such thoughts as these that Jacob lay down to rest, watching the rocks around him which appeared in the evening light almost like a great staircase leading up into the clouds—until he fell asleep.

And while he slept, God sent Jacob a wonderful dream.

In his dream he saw a ladder standing before him, and the top of it reached to Heaven. There were shining Angels going up and down the ladder, and the glory of God shone from Heaven. Then Jacob dreamed that he heard the voice of God saying: "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac. The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy children. Thy family shall spread to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south, and shall be a blessing to all the families of the earth. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest."

The dream faded away, and Jacob awoke, full of wonder at those comforting words. "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not," he thought. "This is none other than the House of God, and this is the gate of Heaven."

It was still very early when Jacob rose up from his hard resting place, and piled up the stones on which his head had lain, to mark the holy place, so that he would know it again: "This place shall not be called Luz any more," he thought, "I shall call it Bethel, the House of God."

Then, before he went on his way, he stood by his little pillar of stones, and looking up to Heaven, made two solemn promises to God. "If God will be with me, and keep me in the way that I go, then shall the Lord be my God. And of all that God shall give me, I will surely give Him back a tenth part."

With a lighter heart Jacob continued his journey until he came to a well in the midst of green fields.

There were three large flocks of sheep in the fields, and some shepherds waiting round the well until it was time to move the heavy stone cover, and draw water for the sheep.

Jacob went up to the shepherds, and asked them whence they came. "We come from Haran," they replied. "Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor?" asked Jacob. "Yes, we know him," answered the shepherds; "and look, there is his daughter, Rachel, coming to water her father's sheep."

Jacob watched the girl leading her flock across the fields. How beautiful she was! She was the daughter of his uncle, Laban, so she must be his cousin.

He went to meet her, and explaining quickly who he was, he kissed her, and wept for joy that his lonely journey was over.

Jacob helped Rachel to draw water for the sheep, then returned with her to her father's house. Laban came out and gave him a warm welcome, because he was Rebekah's son.

A month went by, and Jacob lived most happily at Haran, making friends with his two cousins, Leah and Rachel, and helping with the sheep. "It is not right that you should work for me for nothing, just because you are my nephew," said Laban one day; "what wages shall I give you, if you stay on here?" "I do not want wages," replied Jacob; "if you will give me your younger daughter Rachel for my wife."

So it was settled that Jacob should remain at Haran and work for his uncle for seven years, at the end of which time he should marry Rachel.

The companionship of his favourite cousin, and the happy thoughts of his wedding, made the years pass quickly to Jacob; and at the appointed time a marriage feast was prepared, with merry-making which would last a week.

When the time came for the bride to remove her heavy veil, Jacob had a terrible disappointment; he saw that he had married Leah instead of Rachel!

He went, full of anger, to Laban: "It was right that the elder should be married first," said his uncle calmly, "but if you will work for me for another seven years, I will give you Rachel as well," and Jacob loved Rachel so much that he agreed to this.

During the many years that followed, Jacob learned what it was like to be treated unfairly; he who had deceived his father and his brother was in his turn deceived many times by his uncle, until at last, when he had become a wealthy man, he decided to leave Haran and return to his old home.

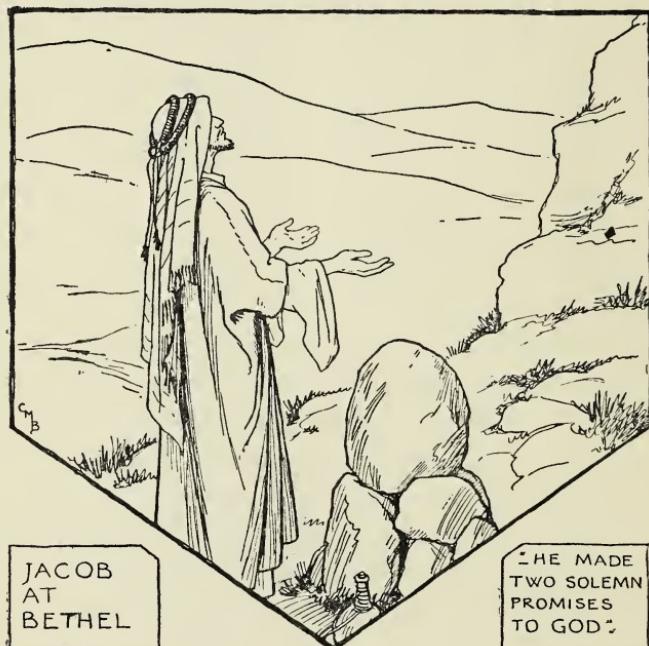
So Jacob, who had fled from the land of Canaan alone, went back twenty years later leading a great company—Leah and Rachel, riding on camels with their eleven sons and one little daughter, flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, and a number of men and women servants.

Jacob's one fear was his meeting with his brother. He sent a messenger ahead to announce his arrival to Esau, and prayed to God that the meeting might be a peaceful one.

Esau came out to greet Jacob, and showed at once that his anger was gone, for he ran up to Jacob and

kissed him. Then Esau looked up and saw Leah and Rachel and all the little boys bowing low before him. "Who are these?" he asked. "These are the children which God has graciously given me," replied Jacob, and Esau made them all welcome to Edom, which was his home.

Jacob, however, did not settle in Edom, but made a home for himself and his family in Canaan, the land which God had promised to give to his children.



Joseph and his Brothers

Joseph's adventures began when he was quite a small boy. He was Jacob's eleventh and favourite son, and until the birth of little Benjamin he was the youngest of the family.

He could dimly remember a long journey on a camel with Rachel his mother, when they all left Haran and came to live in Canaan. Clearer in his mind was another journey which they had all taken to Bethel, when their father had shown them the very place where he had slept and dreamed of Angels—God had spoken again to Jacob there, and had changed his name to Israel—Joseph was proud to be called one of the Children of Israel.

But that journey had a tragic ending, for on the way home little Benjamin was born, and Rachel their mother had died away on those lonely hills.

Home had not been the same since. Certainly his father had seemed to love Joseph more than ever, and had given him a beautiful many-coloured coat, which was the envy of all his brothers—but it made the brothers so jealous and unkind to him.

One night, during the harvest-time, Joseph had a curious dream, that he and his brothers were all binding sheaves of corn in the field, and that the brothers' sheaves bowed down to his sheaf, which stood up in their midst.

Another night he dreamed that the sun and moon and eleven stars were all bowing before him.

Joseph, rather unwisely, told these dreams to his father and brothers. "What is this that you have dreamed?" exclaimed Jacob, "Shall I and your brethren bow ourselves to the ground before you?" And the elder brothers hated Joseph because of these dreams.

Soon after this, when Joseph was seventeen years old, his father called him and said, "Your brethren are feeding the flocks in Shechem. Go now, and see whether it is well with them, and well with the flocks, and bring me word again."

Joseph set out at once on the long walk; at Shechem he was told that the shepherds had moved northwards to Dothan, so he went on, along the caravan route which led from Syria to Egypt.

Joseph's brothers, on the hills of Dothan, saw him when he was still a long way off. "Here comes the Dreamer," they said one to another, "let us kill him, and tell father that a wild beast has devoured him—and we will see what will become of his dreams!"

Reuben, the eldest of the brothers, who was a married man with children of his own, would not agree to this. "Do not take his life," he said, "let us put him down to the bottom of this pit, there is no water in it now." ("I can lift him out later on," he thought.)

When Joseph came near, the brothers seized him roughly, and tore off his coat, then dragged him towards the empty well, let him down to the bottom of it with a rope, and left him there.

Poor Joseph could do nothing to save himself,

what chance had he against ten strong men? He could not tell how long they would leave him in that damp, deep well—he might even die there! He did not know that Reuben meant to help him presently.

While the brothers sat eating their dinner at a little distance from the pit, they noticed a company of merchants travelling slowly, with their heavily laden camels, along the caravan road. They were Midianites, taking their spices to sell in the Egyptian markets.

The sight of them gave Judah an idea. “It will do us no good to kill the lad, for after all he *is* our brother,” he said, “but let us sell him to those merchants.”

As suddenly and quickly as he had been dropped into the pit, Joseph was drawn out again, and soon found himself a prisoner, tramping along the dusty road towards Egypt; while his brothers climbed the hill again, counting their twenty silver pieces, the price of their father’s favourite son.

And what could they say to their father?

A short time later, the shepherds returned home with their flocks, and went to their father’s tent, taking with them the torn remains of Joseph’s coloured coat. “Look what we have found,” said the cruel, deceitful men, “do you know this coat?” “It is my son’s coat,” cried Jacob in great distress, “an evil beast has devoured him. I shall mourn for Joseph as long as I live!”

Jacob wept for many days at the loss of his favourite boy, and his elder sons kept their secret, never thinking that God could bring good out of their evil deed, and that Joseph’s dreams might yet come true.

Joseph in Egypt—I

The long weary journey, the noise and confusion of the Egyptian market, were all over, and Joseph at last found himself a slave in a big Egyptian house; the home of Potiphar, an officer in the body-guard of Pharaoh, King of Egypt.

The busy Egyptian city was full of interest to a boy used to the quiet country life of Canaan. The luxurious houses and palaces, the magnificent temples with their carved and painted pillars, built for the worship of Ra, the Sun-god, must have seemed wonderful to Joseph; and how much greater than the little river Jordan was this wide river Nile, which overflowed its banks and watered the earth for miles around, so that the Egyptians might grow their corn.

Sometimes Joseph must have looked at the splendours of Egypt with a heavy heart, longing for his father and his old peaceful life; but he did his new work bravely and willingly, feeling quite certain that the God, who had spoken to his father in Bethel, was with him here.

Potiphar soon saw that his Hebrew slave was to be trusted, so he gave him more and more important work to do, until in time Joseph was made head of all the servants, and overseer of the household. He would have been content if his master's wife had not taken a sudden dislike to him. She made up wicked and untrue

stories about him, until her husband decided that he must send Joseph to prison.

It was very hard for Joseph, who had done no wrong, to be shut up in the state prison, but still he kept his faith in God, and was so courageous and cheerful that he became a favourite with his keeper, who left his door unlocked so that he could go where he liked in the building, and visit the prisoners in their cells.

The chief butler and the chief baker from the king's palace were among the prisoners, and Joseph made friends with them and took them their meals. One morning he found them both looking very miserable, and discovered that they had been troubled with dreams that night. "Tell me your dreams," said Joseph kindly, "for my God can show me the meaning of them."

Joseph listened while they told him of three clusters of ripe grapes and three baskets of sweet cakes which they had seen. The butler dreamed that he had squeezed the juice of the ripe grapes into King Pharaoh's cup; the baker dreamed that, when he reached the king, his baskets, which he carried on his head, were empty, because the birds had eaten the cakes.

"This is the meaning of the dreams," said Joseph. "The three bunches of grapes and the three baskets are three days. In three days time the butler will be handing Pharaoh his cup of wine at a feast; but the baker will bake for the king no more."

The dreams came true as Joseph had said, and the butler was sent for to return to the palace. "Remember

me, I pray you, when you are in the king's presence," entreated Joseph, "and speak for me—for I have done nothing that I should be shut up in this prison." But for two years the butler forgot all about Joseph, until something happened to remind him of the boy who had explained his dream.

One morning there was great excitement in the palace, all the wise men and scribes of Egypt were sent for, and came in carrying their great volumes of sacred writings, for the king had dreamed, and wished to know the meaning of the dream.

The king had seen in his dream seven fat cows coming up from the River Nile, and feeding upon the grass on the banks. Then up came seven very thin hungry-looking cows, and though they devoured the seven fat ones, they looked no better for their meal.

The wise men were puzzled; they sought in vain in their books, and could find nothing to explain this curious dream.

Then it was that the butler remembered Joseph, and mentioned him to the king. A messenger was sent to the prison at once. Joseph had scarcely time to change his coat. He was hurried to the palace, and straight into the presence of King Pharaoh.

"I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it," said the king, "and I have heard of thee, that when thou hearest a dream, thou canst interpret it." "It is not I, but God, who shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace," replied Joseph.

So Pharaoh told his dream, and waited anxiously for the meaning of it.

"God has sent this dream to show Pharaoh what will come to pass in the land of Egypt," began Joseph.

"The seven fat cows are seven years," he went on, "and they represent seven years of plenty, when the fields will be well-watered and fertile, and harvests will be very good. The seven thin cows are seven years of famine, when the earth will be dry and barren, and no corn will grow. Now, therefore, let Pharaoh choose a wise man who will build barns and store up the corn which grows during the years of plenty, that he may be able to sell it to the people, and they will have bread to eat in the years of famine."

"Where can I find such a wise man as thou!" cried the king, drawing his ring from his finger, and giving it to Joseph. "Thou shalt be overseer of my house, and governor of all the land of Egypt!"

By the king's order Joseph was given fine clothes to wear, a gold chain for his neck, a beautiful house, a chariot to ride in, and an Egyptian lady for his wife.

During the next seven years Joseph appointed overseers in every city in Egypt to build storehouses, and fill them with corn from the fields around; then he travelled over the country to see how his orders were being carried out; and wherever he went his servants ran before his chariot, and everyone bowed as he passed by.

After the seven years of plenty came the time, foretold by Joseph, when the earth was parched and no corn would grow. The people went to Pharaoh, asking for bread. "Go unto Joseph," said the king, "and what he saith to you, do."

So the hungry Egyptians flocked to Joseph, and he ordered that his storehouses should be opened, and that the overseers should sell corn to the people.

Other countries besides Egypt were suffering from famine too. The land of Canaan became very short of bread. The news spread around that there was plenty of corn in Egypt, and Joseph soon had men from many lands coming to buy from his well-filled barns.



Joseph in Egypt—II

Who are these ten men, bowing with their faces to the earth before Joseph, the governor of Egypt? They are dressed like shepherds, and they speak in the Hebrew language, asking whether they may buy corn to fill the empty sacks which they have brought with them from the land of Canaan.

Can they be Joseph's elder brothers? Yes! Joseph knew them at once—but he would not make himself known to them yet. So he sent for his interpreter, and spoke to them sternly in Egyptian—they must not know that he understood their native speech.

"Where do you come from," he asked; "are you here to spy out the poverty of the land?"

"Nay, my lord, we are honest men from the land of Canaan," they explained; "we are no spies, we are all the sons of one man. We have left our youngest brother at home with our father, and are come to buy food."

"Now I shall prove whether your words are true," said Joseph. "When you return home, one of you shall remain here a prisoner, until I see that young brother of whom you spoke. You shall buy corn for your families to-day, but I will sell you no more unless your youngest brother comes with you."

Joseph then gave orders that the sacks which the men had brought should be filled with corn, and that,

unknown to them, their money should be returned to them, in the top of their sacks; that Simeon should be bound and kept a prisoner, and the other nine allowed to depart.

As they loaded up their asses the brothers were saying to one another: "This is a punishment to us for the way we treated Joseph," and they did not know that Joseph himself was listening to their words!

Old Israel was anxiously awaiting the return of his sons from Egypt, and was most perplexed when he heard their story of the rough way in which the governor had spoken to them, of the finding of the money in the top of their sacks, and of the imprisonment of Simeon until they should return with Benjamin.

"Joseph is gone, and Simeon is gone, and now you would take Benjamin away from me!" cried the old man.

But when their corn was all used, and they needed to go to Egypt to buy more, the nine brothers agreed that they dared not face the stern governor again, unless they had Benjamin with them.

"Send the lad with me, Father," said Judah, the fourth brother, "I will take care of him," and very unwillingly Israel let him go. "Take also a present to the governor," said the old man; "take some choice fruits, a little honey, and some almonds; take double money, for perhaps it was a mistake that it was returned in your sacks; and may God give you mercy before the man."

When Joseph saw his brothers coming, and Ben-



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jamin with them, he called to his steward and said: “ Bring those men into my house, and make ready a meal, for they shall dine with me at noon.”

The brothers were afraid when they were brought into Joseph’s house. “ It is because of the money that we found in our sacks,” they thought, and they spoke fearfully to the steward. “ Oh, my lord,” they cried, “ we know not who put the money in our sacks, but we have brought it back again now, as well as more money to buy corn.”

“ Do not be afraid,” replied the steward. “ I had your money—it was your God who put treasure in your sacks; and come, here is water for you to wash your feet, and provender for your asses.”

When Joseph came in at noon to dine, the brothers bowed low before him, and presented the gifts.

“ Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke?” asked Joseph, “ and this must be your youngest brother—God be gracious to thee, my son.”

At dinner, the brothers were served from Joseph’s own table, and Benjamin was given five times as much as any of the others.

Early the next morning the brothers started on their homeward journey, with their sacks filled according to Joseph’s instructions. They had not gone far beyond the city, when they were stopped by Joseph’s steward, who was running after them. “ Why have you done evil to one who has treated you well!” he cried. “ You have taken the silver cup from which my lord drinks!”

“ God forbid that we should do such a thing!”

exclaimed the brothers. "Let the man in whose sack the cup is found be my lord's slave!" and they lifted their sacks from their asses' backs and opened them in great haste.

To their horror and surprise the silver cup was found in Benjamin's sack!

They could not let Benjamin return alone to the city, so they all turned round and accompanied the steward back to Joseph's house, and into Joseph's presence.

"What is this that you have done?" said Joseph gravely; "the man in whose hand my cup is found shall be my bondman—the rest of you can go in peace."

Judah, in great distress, went forward and stood before Joseph. "Oh, my lord, let me, I pray you, speak a word," he pleaded. "We cannot go home without our youngest brother—for our father loves the lad! We had another brother, but he is dead, and if we lose Benjamin my father will die of sorrow. When our father said 'Go again and buy corn from Egypt' we said 'we dare not go unless Benjamin go with us,' and I said, 'I will take care of him'—therefore, my lord, I pray you, let me be my lord's bondman, and let the lad go home to his father."

Joseph was touched by this appeal, he could not keep his secret any longer, he must end their distress; so he sent his Egyptian servants out of the room, and stood alone before his brothers.

"I am Joseph," he said.

The brothers were too amazed to speak.

“ I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt,” he repeated. “ Do not be angry with yourselves for what you have done, for God has been with me, and used me to do a great work here. So it was God, and not you, who sent me here. And God has made me a governor over the land of Egypt, to store up corn in the years of plenty, and to save the lives of many during the years of famine. Come near me, my brothers!” and Joseph kissed his brothers and wept over them.

The news was brought to King Pharaoh that Joseph’s brothers were there, and he sent a message to Joseph, “ Say to your brethren, go into the land of Canaan and fetch your father and your wives and your children, your flocks and herds, and come into Egypt. I will give you the land of Goshen for your home.”

The brothers returned to their father with the wonderful news; he could not believe it until he saw the wagon which Joseph had sent to fetch him, the asses laden with food for the journey, the fine garments which all the brothers wore, and the Egyptian coins which Benjamin displayed.

When at night God spoke to the old man in a dream, and said, “ I am the God of thy father; fear not to go down into Egypt, for I will there make of thee a great nation,” his last doubt was taken away.

“ It is enough,” he said, “ Joseph my son is still alive, I will go and see him before I die!”

The great company travelled slowly from Canaan, along the caravan road towards Egypt. Joseph drove in his chariot to meet them, and showed himself to

his old father. They wept for joy, and Israel said, “Now I can die in peace, for I have seen thy face again!”

Joseph led his family into Goshen, which is a fertile part of Egypt on the east side of the Nile, and they lived there happily for the next seventeen years.

Israel was then a very old man, and felt that he had not long to live, so he sent for all his sons, to give them his last blessing. Joseph brought his two boys with him, “These are my sons, whom God has given me,” he said. Their old grandfather drew them close to him and kissed them, then laid his hands on their heads and blessed them. “I had not thought to see thy face, Joseph,” he said, “and now God has let me see thy sons also. God Almighty, who appeared to me at Bethel, shall be with you, and shall bring your children’s children into Canaan, the promised land.”

When he had blessed them all, the old man died; but his sons lived on in Goshen, and became a large and prosperous company, known to the Egyptians as “the children of Israel”.

The Baby in the Bulrushes

There was great and terrible trouble in the land of Goshen. The King of Egypt had just ordered that every new-born baby, if it were a boy, should be thrown into the River Nile.

Surely the Pharaoh, who had been good to Joseph and his brethren, would not be so cruel!

No, but it was four hundred and thirty years since the children of Israel had come to live in Goshen, and now there was a king who knew nothing about Joseph. The families of the Israelites had grown so large, that they were called tribes, and the new king was afraid that some day they might join with his enemies and fight against him. So he made the men work for him. They had to labour all the long hot days making bricks and building great cities for him; and then he announced this new and wicked command about the babies.

There was a man and his wife, belonging to the tribe of Levi, who had three children, Miriam, and Aaron, and a baby boy.

When the baby was born, he was such a lovely child that his mother could not bear to part with him. No, she would disobey the king's cruel command, and hide her baby from the king's overseers.

But when the child was three months old, she felt she could not hide him any longer; he was getting bigger and stronger, and might be discovered any day.

Then the poor mother thought of one last plan to try and save her baby's life. She would place him on the river bank just where the king's daughter came down to bathe; perhaps the princess would see him and have pity on him.

Quickly and skilfully she made a little cradle of plaited papyrus reeds, and covered the outside with pitch to make it water-tight. Early the next morning she laid her baby in it, put it down among the bulrushes on the bank of the Nile, and with many tears and prayers to God, she left it.

There in his quaint little bed the baby slept peacefully, with his sister Miriam close by, hidden in the tall rushes, to watch him, and run to him if he should wake and cry.

Presently the baby did wake. Strange hands were lifting him from his cradle, strange voices were speaking to him, and he began to cry.

Miriam crept out from her hiding place. She saw the princess herself looking very kindly at the crying baby, and heard her say to her ladies: "This must be one of the Hebrews' children. Poor little thing, I should like to have him for my own."

A wonderful idea came to Miriam as she listened to these words; she stepped eagerly up to the princess: "Shall I fetch a Hebrew woman to take care of the baby, and nurse it for you?" she asked. The princess liked this suggestion. "Yes, go," she replied.

Miriam disappeared quickly in the direction of the little Hebrew huts, and returned in a very short time, followed by her mother.

"Take this child, and nurse it for me," said the princess, "I will pay you wages for doing it. And when he is old enough, bring him to the palace to me."

With joy and thankfulness the poor mother took her baby home again. How mercifully God had spared his life! She did not know that God had saved him so that he should do a great and wonderful work when he grew up.

The princess named the baby Moses, and when he was about three years old she had him to live with her at the palace; she dressed him in lovely Egyptian clothes, employed masters to teach him everything that an Egyptian prince should know, and treated him just as though he were her own son.

Moses was a clever boy, and learnt all that the wise men of Egypt could teach him. He also found out that he really belonged to the children of Israel, and one day he went away by himself to the land of Goshen, to see his brethren.

The sights that he saw distressed him very much. There were the poor Hebrew men toiling in the brick fields, with stern Egyptian task-masters standing by them with whips, and beating them if they did not work fast enough.

Moses watched this cruel treatment until he could bear it no longer, then he lost his temper. He rushed at one of the task-masters, and beat him to death.

When Pharaoh heard of this, he was very angry. He would not have anyone interfering with his work in the brick fields—Moses must be killed!

But Moses fled from Egypt, and went to live in the land of Midian.

For forty years Moses lived as a shepherd in Midian, but he did not forget his poor brethren labouring in Pharaoh's brick fields. What could he do for them? He had tried to help them once, and brought trouble upon himself. Only God could save them now, and no one had heard God's voice since the far off days of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob.

Then, one day, when Moses was out with the flocks, he noticed a bush at a little distance from him, which seemed to be burning—could the heat of the sun have set it on fire? He must go and see. Was that an Angel standing in the midst of the flames? and whose was that voice, calling, "Moses, Moses"?

"Draw not near," said the voice. "Put off your shoes from your feet, for this is holy ground; and I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob."

Moses slipped off his sandals, and covered his face with his hands—he knew now that he was in the presence of the great God of Israel.

"I have seen the sorrows of my people, and I have heard their cry," continued the voice of God, "and I am come to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them again into the land of Canaan, a good land, flowing with milk and honey. Come now, and I will send thee to bring forth my people out of Egypt. I know that the king of Egypt will not give you leave to go; and I will put forth my

hand and smite Egypt with all my wonders, and after that he will let you go."

Moses was afraid when he heard this—the task seemed far too great for him.

"Who am I, O Lord, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" he said. "Perhaps they will not believe that thou hast sent me, and what shall I say to them, for I am not eloquent, I am slow of speech!"

"Certainly, I will be with thee," replied the gracious voice, "I will teach thee what thou shalt speak. Behold, thy brother Aaron cometh to meet thee. I will be with thy mouth and with his mouth; he shall be thy spokesman to the people."

The flames died down, leaving the bush fresh and green, and quite unhurt by the fire.

Moses turned to greet Aaron, told him all that God had said, and together the brothers, accompanied by Moses' wife and two little boys, left Midian, to return to Goshen with the good news that the mighty God of Israel was going to deliver his people from their bondage.

The Exodus

The good news spread quickly through the land of Goshen that Moses had returned as a deliverer, and the children of Israel would soon be released from their bondage; their God had not forgotten them, he would show forth his power before Pharaoh, and lead his people in triumph to the Promised Land.

Moses and Aaron stood boldly before Pharaoh, and proclaimed the words of God: "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may worship me in the wilderness."

"Who is the God of Israel, that I should hearken to his voice?" cried the angry king. "The men are idle, therefore do they say, 'Let us go and serve our God'. Let their work be made harder than before. I will not let them go!"

Pharaoh then began to learn that to disobey the voice of God brings trouble; and the land of Egypt was plagued because of their hard-hearted king.

The Egyptians were accustomed to frogs hopping up from the River Nile, flies coming into the houses from the dusty streets, and locusts eating off the shoots of corn in the fields; but now the frogs came up in thousands, the flies in great swarms, the locusts in clouds so that the sky was darkened with them. Besides this, there was the worst hail-storm that had ever been known, and also painful illnesses, which

spread quickly among the people and their cattle.

Pharaoh's servants came to him. "Let the Hebrews go, that they may serve their God," they pleaded. "Do you not see that the land of Egypt is being destroyed because of them?" But Pharaoh did not care how much his people were troubled. He would show them that he did not fear the God of Israel!

At last Moses and Aaron returned to Goshen, where hope and expectation were growing. The children of Israel had not been plagued like the rest of Egypt, and they had received many gifts of jewellery and other treasures from the Egyptian women, who were anxious to be in favour with people who had such a powerful God, and gave them anything they asked for.

Moses gathered the heads of the tribes of Israel together, and spoke to them very solemnly, "This month shall be to you the first month of the year, and you shall remember this day for ever. For on this night the Lord will send an angel into every house in Egypt, and the first-born son of every family will die; but the angel will pass by your houses, and will not enter in; that all may know that the God of Israel is the Lord. Therefore this day shall be remembered from year to year, and shall be a feast day to the Lord."

At midnight the children of Israel were in their houses with their doors shut, and over each door was a mark of blood—the blood of a lamb—for Moses had said, "When the angel of the Lord comes to-night, he will see the marks, and will pass over your houses."

Inside every house the families were eating the

last supper they would have in Egypt. Moses had told them to roast a lamb, and eat it with bitter herbs and bread—the bread was in flat cakes, for there was not time to leaven it and knead it. All their possessions were packed up, and they were dressed for their journey. “ Eat your supper standing, with your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand,” Moses had commanded, “ and eat it in haste, for it is the Lord’s Passover.”

Suddenly an urgent message came from Pharaoh, who at last was frightened, for his eldest son had died at midnight. “ Rise up quickly, get you forth from among my people, and go, serve the Lord, as you have said!”

From every house in Goshen came men, women, and children, more than six hundred thousand of them, with their bundles on their backs, driving their sheep and cattle with them, and following Moses and Aaron out of Egypt.

Towards the wilderness they went, on and on, by day and night, until they came to the sandy shores of the Red Sea. They were led by a cloud which went before them, shining white by day, and glowing with red light by night—a wonderful guide which God had sent to assure them of his presence with them.

The mighty company put up their tents, and stopped for a few days’ rest by the Red Sea. How peaceful it was, with the sea before them, and the wilderness between them and their cruel taskmasters!

But what is that moving far away across the wilderness? Are those chariots? Is the army of Egypt following them? Has Pharaoh hardened his heart again?

The people rushed in a panic to Moses—where could they go, with their enemy behind them, and the sea before! “Why have you brought us here?” they cried: “It were better to serve the Egyptians in the brick fields, than to die here in the wilderness!”

“Fear not,” said Moses calmly. “Stand still and see how the Lord will save you.”

The cloud which God had sent hid the Israelites from their pursuers, while Moses stood on the shore, holding out his staff towards the sea. A strong east wind began to blow. It raged all night, driving the sea before it, until by the morning, there was a sandy path right to the farther shore. Without delay, Moses led the people across the wet sand, until they all stood upon the far side of the Red Sea. He again stretched out his staff, the wind dropped, the tide came slowly back, the sandy path disappeared, and they were safe.

How could they show their thankfulness to the mighty God who had delivered them so wonderfully!

Miriam, Moses’ sister, and the other women took their tambourines and began to dance for joy.

“The Lord is my strength and my song,
And he is become my salvation.
This is my God, and I will praise him!
The Lord shall reign for ever and ever!”

sang Moses, and all the people shouted together, “I will sing unto the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously!”

In the Wilderness

“ There was bread enough in the land of Egypt. Why did you not leave us to live and die there?” complained the children of Israel. “ You have brought us into this wilderness to kill us all with hunger!”

It was two months since the escape from Egypt, and all the food which they had brought with them was gone. They could not find even wild figs or grapes in this desolate place.

So they gathered round Moses’ tent with their bitter complaint. They had not yet learned that the God who had guided them by a shining cloud, loved them too much to let them starve.

Moses and Aaron came out and faced the discontented crowd. “ Come near and behold the glory of the Lord,” cried Aaron. “ Your God who brought you out of Egypt has heard your complaint. He will send you meat in the evening, and in the morning you shall have bread from heaven.”

The pillar of cloud glowed with a brighter light as Aaron was speaking; the people saw it and took courage, and returned to their tents to await the promised meat.

Towards evening the sky was darkened by a great cloud, which came nearer and nearer, and soon proved to be thousands of quails, flying low, with the wind.

The people caught and cooked the small brown

birds. What a delicious supper they had, and how contentedly they went to rest that night!

"What is it?" exclaimed the Israelites the next morning, as they gathered up into bowls something white, like hoar-frost, which they found on the ground.

"It is the bread which the Lord has sent," replied Moses. "Gather up enough for one day. There will be more to-morrow, and every day, so long as you need it. Only on the sixth day of the week gather up enough for two days, because the seventh day is the Sabbath, and no man should go out to seek food on the day of rest."

The people eagerly tasted the strange new food; it was sweet, as sweet as honey, and it looked like a little round white seed. They named it Manna, and each morning they rose up early to gather it in, before the sun melted it away.

• • • • •
"Wherefore did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? Give us water! Give us water that we may drink!"

It was the cry of the children of Israel, gathered round Moses' tent again.

Moses was almost in despair. How could he teach these people to have more faith in the God who had delivered them so wonderfully from the bondage of Egypt, and fed them daily with manna.

He took up his staff and led the miserable people to one of the rocky cliffs, which rose up bare and grey before them.

"Must we bring water out of the rock for you?" he cried, and struck it twice with his staff.

Immediately a great stream of water flowed out from the rock, splashed down over the stones, and ran in rivers among the people, so that they and their cattle could all drink.

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The Israelites moved slowly southwards, sometimes stopping and pitching their tents for a time, then on again, towards the mountainous land where Moses had once spent forty years; he knew this part of the country well, it was not quite so bare and desolate here.

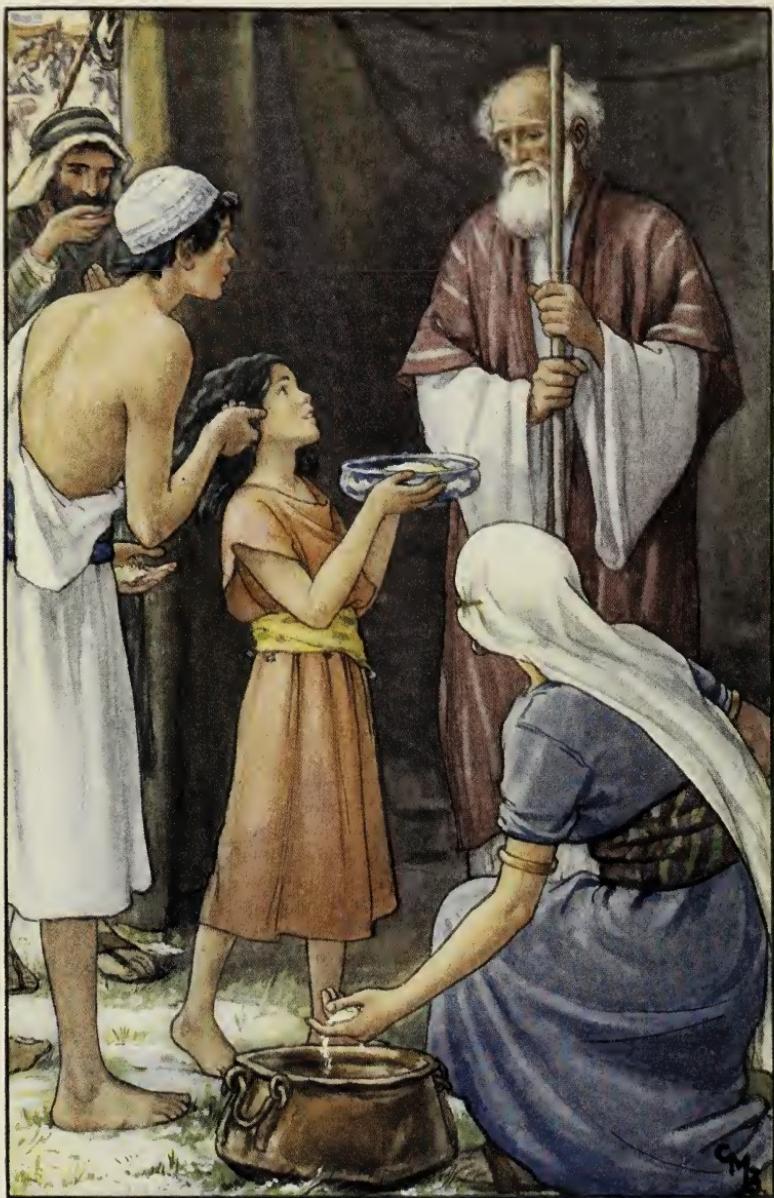
But they found it already inhabited. A tribe of Amalekites, a wandering people, had settled there, and when they saw the great company of Israelites approaching, they made ready for battle.

The Israelites must fight, to protect their wives and children from these war-like men.

Moses was too old to lead an army into battle. Without delay he called Joshua to him. "Choose out men, and go, fight with Amalek," he commanded the young man. "To-morrow I will go to the top of the hill, and will pray to the Lord for you."

From early morning until evening Joshua led and encouraged his untrained men against the fierce Amalekites, and all day long Moses watched the battle from the top of a hill. He had promised to pray for his people, so he stood with his hands outstretched to heaven, calling upon God to give them the victory.

Sometimes his hands felt so heavy, he was obliged



THE BREAD WHICH GOD SENT

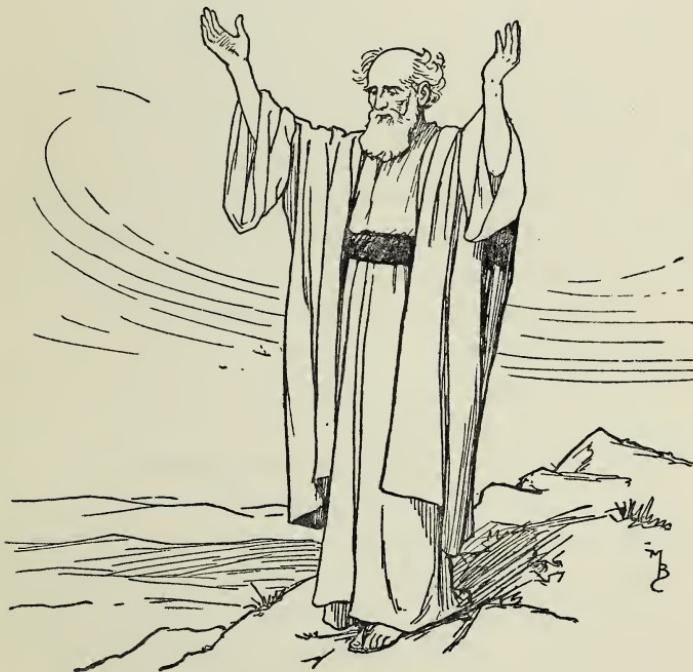
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to let them down to rest; but the Israelites fought better when Moses' hands were held up in prayer, and they lost courage when he put them down.

Aaron and Hur, noticing this, joined Moses on the hill top; they gave him a big stone to sit on, and stood on either side of him, to hold up his hands.

They supported him thus until the sun set, and the enemy were driven away, so that the Israelites could rest in peace.



At Mount Sinai

What a grand sight met the eyes of the children of Israel when they reached the plain at the foot of Mount Sinai!

All around them were great peaks and crags, and before them the mighty mountain of the Lord, towering up into the clouds. It filled them with awe and wonder. Surely this must be the dwelling place of God.

"Put up a fence, that no one may come near to the mountain, for this is a holy place," said Moses to the heads of the tribes, "and go, tell the people to wash their clothes, and make themselves clean, for in three days the Lord himself will come down upon the mount, and will give you his commandments. Behold, thus saith the Lord, If you will obey my voice, and keep my commandments, you shall be a holy nation, and my chosen people."

"All that the Lord shall command, we will do," replied the men of Israel.

On the third morning Mount Sinai was almost hidden by thick clouds. Moses went through the fence in the presence of all the people, and was soon lost to sight.

The clouds became darker, lightning flashed, and peals of thunder shook the whole mountain. All the people trembled with fear. They believed that God himself was speaking in the midst of the raging storm.

Presently Moses reappeared with God's message:

"Hear, O Israel," he cried. "The Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy might."

The Israelites listened with great attention while Moses went on to proclaim the Laws of God:

"Thou shalt have none other gods beside me.
Thou shalt not worship nor bow down to any graven image.
Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
Honour thy father and thy mother.
Thou shalt not kill.
Thou shalt not steal.
Thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may be well with thee, and with thy children, for ever."

These and many more commandments Moses gave the children of Israel; then, taking Joshua with him, he again went up into the clouds which covered the mount, leaving Aaron in charge of the camp.

Up and up they went together, until Moses left Joshua to await his return, and went on still further up to the mysterious mountain top, to be alone with God; for it is in solitude and quiet that the Spirit of God can best speak to the spirit of man.

Weeks went by and Moses did not come down from the mountain. The Israelites were first anxious, and then impatient because he did not return. They went to Aaron. "We do not know what has become of Moses," they said, "we want another leader. Make us a god which will go before us," and they took

off their gold ear-rings and offered them to Aaron.

Aaron melted down the ear-rings, and formed them into a golden calf. He set it up before the people and said: "This is your god, O Israel, which brought you out of the land of Egypt. To-morrow shall be a feast-day to your god."

The next morning Moses, who had been forty days on the mountain top, rejoined Joshua, and together they came down towards the camp. Moses was carrying two flat tablets of stone, on which were written ten laws of God.

"I can hear the people shouting," said Joshua, as they came down the steep rocky slopes, "it is the sound of war in the camp."

"It is not the noise of battle, it is singing that I hear," replied Moses; and as they came a little nearer, a terrible sight met their eyes—all the children of Israel wildly singing and dancing and bowing down before a golden calf which was set up in their midst.

Only forty days ago these people had heard God's words, "Thou shalt not worship nor bow down to any graven image." How quickly they had forgotten!

Moses became furious with anger. He flung away the tablets of stone, so that they were broken to pieces, and he rushed into the centre of the noisy crowd. He seized the golden calf, threw it down and ground it to powder, then turned to Aaron. "What have the people done to you, that you have led them into this great sin?" he demanded.

The Israelites were full of fear and misery when

they saw Moses' anger; they realized then what a dreadful thing they had done. They trembled to think of the punishment that God might bring upon them.

Moses pitied the people when he saw their distress. " You have sinned a great sin," he said to them, " but I will go up unto the Lord for you; perhaps I can make your peace with him."

So Moses went up the great grey mountain once more, and fell on his face before God. " O Lord God, this people have sinned a great sin, but destroy them not," he prayed; " remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and look not to the wickedness of this people, nor to their sin. But if thou wilt not forgive this sin, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book of life, instead of them."

And God, who is always merciful to those who are repentant, forgave his sinful people for Moses' sake.

After many days Moses came down to the camp, bringing two new tablets of stone, in the place of those which he had broken. Moses had been so near to God on the mountain, that the glory of heaven was still on him when he came down, and his face shone so that the Israelites were afraid to come near him.

He covered his face with a veil, and spoke to the people. " Let us make a dwelling place for God in our midst," he said. " Let everyone who has a willing heart bring jewels of gold and silver, fine linen dyed purple and blue and scarlet, goat's hair, and ram's skins dyed red, and offer them to the Lord. We will make of them a holy place, a tabernacle in which we can meet our God."

This suggestion pleased the people, and they all joyfully brought their treasures, and offered them willingly to God. All who were skilled workmen came forward and offered their help, and the work began.

A tent of the fine blue, purple and scarlet linen was made, supported on wooden poles overlaid with gold. A larger tent of woven goats' hair was made to go over this, and an outer covering of dyed rams' skins to protect it from the weather.

A gilded wooden box, which Moses called an ark, was made to go inside the tent, to contain the two stone tablets of the laws of God. Two kneeling angels were carved out of wood, overlaid with gold, and placed one on each end of the golden ark.

The workers in gold and silver made candlesticks, lamps, and a golden altar; and those who were skilled in needlework made robes for Aaron and his sons, who were to be the priests of the Lord.

At last the work was finished. Moses placed the golden ark inside the tent, he lighted the candles and lamps, he burnt sweet-smelling incense on the altar, and he put the beautifully embroidered priest's garments on to Aaron.

How deep was the joy of the people when the wonderful cloud, which was always with them, entered the new tent, and filled it with glory! The people believed then that God accepted this tabernacle; they knew that he had come to dwell among them.

The Twelve Spies

In the second year of their wanderings in the wilderness the children of Israel came near to the promised land.

“Behold, the Lord your God has set the land before you; go up and take possession. Fear not, neither be dismayed,” said Moses. How thankful he must have been to think that the long journey was nearly over, and the land of Canaan in sight.

“Let us send men before us,” suggested the Israelites, “that they may search the land for us, and bring us word of the way by which we must go up, and the cities unto which we shall come.”

This idea seemed good to Moses, and he chose twelve men, one from each of the tribes of Israel. “Go across the mountains,” Moses instructed them, “see the land, what it is like, and the people who live there, whether they be strong or weak, whether they be few or many. Be of good courage, and bring back with you some of the fruit of the land.”

The little party of chosen men set off across the mountains, leaving the rest of the Israelites encamped at Kadesh.

Forty days went by, and then at last the twelve spies could be seen coming back along the mountain track. Two were carrying a staff between them, with

something hanging from it, which could soon be distinguished as a big bunch of grapes.

Surrounded by an excited crowd, the spies made their way to Moses' tent, and began to tell their news.

"It is a good land, which the Lord our God gives us; surely it is flowing with milk and honey, and this is the fruit of it," and as they spoke they displayed some pomegranates and figs which they had brought, also the fine grapes which they had carried so carefully.

"And what of the cities and the people?" inquired the eager multitude.

"The cities are very great, and are defended by high walls," replied ten of the spies, with gloomy looks; "we cannot go up against the people of the land, for they are strong, stronger than we. We saw that Amalek lives in the south, and the Canaanites by the sea-side. The Amorites also dwell in the mountains. Has the Lord brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of enemies who will destroy us?"

A cry of despair rose from the disappointed people; had they come this long journey for nothing!

Joshua and Caleb, the two remaining spies, had not yet spoken; what had they to say?

Caleb stood out beside Moses, and the crowd stopped their clamour to listen. "Do not be afraid, let us go up at once and possess the land," he said bravely; "we are well able to overcome those strong men, for the Lord our God, who goes before us, he will fight for us."

These courageous words should have filled the faint-hearted Israelites with fresh hope, but the ten

faithless spies went about among them, saying: "It were better for us to die here in the wilderness than go into the land of Canaan. The men there are giants. We were like grasshoppers beside them, and they will destroy us as grasshoppers!" until the unhappy company went weeping to their tents.

The next morning the men of Israel came together full of a new determination; they would choose another leader in place of Moses, and return to Egypt! It would be better to work in Pharaoh's brick fields, or even to die in the wilderness, than to let their wives and children suffer at the hands of those giants in the land of Canaan!

In vain did Joshua and Caleb plead with them, and pray them to go fearlessly on, trusting in their mighty God. They refused to listen, they would rather die than go forward; and they were about to silence the speakers by throwing large stones at them, when they noticed the light shining brightly from the new tabernacle. This sobered them at once, for they knew that Moses was there, kneeling in prayer before God.

Presently Moses came out and spoke very gravely to the perplexed and frightened company. He told them that he had been asking God to forgive them once more, as he had done so many times since they left Egypt.

"The Lord is slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy," said Moses; "thus saith the Lord, I have pardoned according to thy word. But these men who have seen my glory, and have not hearkened to my voice, surely they shall not see the Promised Land.

They shall wander in the wilderness for forty years, and their children shall go up and possess the land. Only my servants Joshua and Caleb, because they have trusted me fully, them will I bring into the Land."

There was great dismay among the Israelites when they fully understood these words. Why had they listened to those ten cowardly spies? Why had they doubted the God who had led them so far in safety? Their God had forgiven them, but they still had to suffer a severe punishment for their sin. They had angrily asked to die in the wilderness, and God had granted their wish—not they, but their children, would enter with Joshua and Caleb into the land of Canaan.

After a night of mourning and misery, Moses ordered the whole company to pack up their tents, and turn back again towards the Red Sea.

The long years before them seemed as dreary and as endless as the wilderness itself.

Sorrowfully they followed the Ark of God, which was carried in front of them, understanding that they had brought this trouble upon themselves, knowing in their hearts that they were not fit to dwell in the longed-for Promised Land.

The New Leader

“ I am an hundred and twenty years old this day, I can lead you no longer. But Joshua, he shall go over this river before you.” So said Moses to the assembled tribes of Israel, on the plains of Moab, to the east of the River Jordan.

The splendid old leader, leaning on his staff, looked anxiously at this great company; the people whom he had lived for, worked for, prayed for, during the forty long years in the wilderness. The men whom he saw before him were young and strong, most of them had been born since the escape from Egypt; their fathers had died in the wilderness, and these eager young men were ready to go up and possess the Promised Land; they only needed a fearless leader.

Joshua, who had proved himself a brave and wise man, was the leader whom Moses had chosen.

“ Be strong, and of a good courage,” said Moses, laying his hand on Joshua’s head, “ and thou shalt bring these people into the land which God has promised to their fathers to give them. And the Lord, he will be with thee, he will not fail thee. Fear not, neither be dismayed.”

In solemn silence the Israelites watched this commissioning of their new leader; then they saw that Moses had yet something more to say. For many years he had been writing down a number of laws,

which, if they obeyed, would help them to live good lives, pleasing to God and at peace with one another. He was most anxious that these rules should not be lost or forgotten, so he called to him the men of the tribe of Levi. (Aaron, the high priest, had died, and the Levites had been appointed priests, in charge of the tabernacle.)

Moses took up the great roll of writings, and handed it to the chief of the Levites. "Take this book of the Law," he said, "and put it by the tablets of stone in the Ark of God. At the end of every seven years, when you are thanking God for the gathering-in of the harvest at the feast of tabernacles, you shall read this Law before all Israel; before the men, the women, the little ones, and the strangers that may be with you; that all may know and obey the words of this Law."

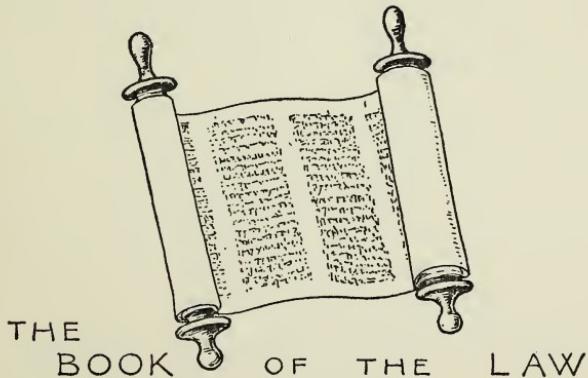
The aged leader then gave the twelve tribes of Israel his last blessing, and went slowly away from them, across the plains to the lonely Mount Nebo, which rose among the hills of Moab.

From the top of the mountain there was a wonderful view. Moses could see across the River Jordan the hills and plains of Canaan, and beyond them a silver line of the Great Sea. He rested there, and gazed at the fair sight—the green and fertile land flowing with milk and honey, until his eyes closed, and God took his spirit away to Paradise.

The Israelites had watched the lonely old figure out of sight with very sad hearts. They knew that they would see their beloved leader no more. They knew

that they had often been a heavy burden to him, they had tried his patience, and caused him much sorrow, but how good he had always been, how wise! He had brought God near to them, for God loved him, and spoke to him face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

For thirty days the people mourned and wept for Moses; then they turned to Joshua. They believed that he was a man to be trusted, a man whom they could respect and obey. He was a clever warrior, for had he not led an untrained army against the Amalekites? He was one of those who had not lost heart when he saw the walled cities in the land of Canaan, and the strong men who guarded them; he would boldly face every difficulty, for he knew that the God who had guided Moses would also strengthen him; he was eager to go forward, and they were ready to follow him, through any dangers, into the Promised Land.



The Fall of Jericho

Jericho was a large city standing on the west side of the river Jordan, at the entrance to two mountain passes leading to the centre of Canaan. It was surrounded by high walls, and defended by a garrison of soldiers.

Joshua saw that he must begin by taking this city, so he sent two spies to find out all they could about its defences, and the country round.

The spies returned after a few days, eager to tell Joshua their news. They had been right into the city, and spoken to a Canaanite woman, who told them that strange stories had reached Canaan about them and their mighty God, and all the inhabitants were full of fear.

On the third day after the return of the spies, the Israelites were assembled by the Jordan, waiting to cross over—but how could they cross that swiftly flowing river?

“Come, and behold the wonders which the Lord your God will show you!” cried Joshua. “Let the ark of the Lord pass over before you; and when the feet of the priests which carry the ark shall touch the water, the river shall cease to flow; and you shall all walk over on dry ground.”

The priests, carrying the golden ark, stepped down to the river. The upper waters stopped flowing from the mountains, the lower waters streamed away to the Salt Sea, and a dry path appeared.

The priests stood still in the midst of the river bed, until the whole multitude passed by them, and reached the farther bank; then they too came up from the river, and the waters flowed on as before.

That night the Israelites put up their tents and slept on the plain between the river and the city of Jericho. The next day they kept the solemn feast of the Passover, with thankful hearts, in memory of their deliverance from Egypt forty years before.

In the evening Joshua was walking up and down before the city in deep thought, gazing at the towering walls and great shut gates, when he noticed an armed man standing at a little distance from him, with a drawn sword in his hand.

Joshua went boldly up to him. "Are you on our side, or are you for our enemies?" he asked.

"As captain of the host of the Lord am I come," replied the stranger.

Joshua took off his shoes as a sign of reverence, and fell on his face before the angel warrior; he knew now that an unseen angel host would be with them when he led his people up to Jericho.

The men of Jericho, shut up in their city, were watching and waiting for an attack.

At last, one morning they heard the tramp of many feet. The Israelites were coming!

It was a long and solemn procession that they saw approaching their city—armed men in front, then priests with trumpets carrying that mysterious ark, then a great multitude, marching in order.

There was no attack. Silently the mighty procession

tramped right round the city, and then back to their camp. For six days the same strange and silent march took place, watched with growing fear and awe by the people of Jericho.

On the seventh morning the procession started at daybreak, for they were to march round the city seven times.

" You shall not shout, nor let your voice be heard, until the time that I bid you," commanded Joshua, " but when you hear the priests blow their trumpets, shout, for the Lord will give you the city."

On and on tramped the silent army; greater grew the terror of the men of Jericho, gazing from their city walls, not daring to attack the quiet host.

Five times round—six times round—seven times—and suddenly the priests raised their ram's horn trumpets to their lips and blew a loud blast.

" Shout!" cried Joshua, " for the Lord has given you the city!" and the Israelites gave a mighty shout.

Above the noise of the shouting was a terrifying crash. The walls of Jericho were falling!

Down came the walls, the towers, the great gates, level with the ground. In rushed the Israelites from every side, and the city was theirs!

The news of this wonderful victory was soon made known, and Joshua's fame spread all through the land.



“THE LORD IS WITH THEE”

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(See page 82)

Gideon

Gideon was in the wine-press, well hidden by the high walls, beating the husks from his father's little store of wheat. The threshing must be done very secretly for fear of the Midianites.

For the last seven years the children of Israel had suffered from bands of Midianites who swarmed in from the east of Jordan; they carried away sheep, oxen, and the corn from the fields, leaving the Israelites poor and helpless before such an overwhelming enemy.

It was many years since Joshua had led the children of Israel into Canaan. With God's help they had driven the Canaanites out of the cities, and taken possession of the country from the Jordan to the Great Sea.

Joshua had divided the land amongst the twelve tribes of Israel, and before his death he had said to them: " See that you go not aside from the book of the law of Moses; and go not among the strange peoples, to marry with them or to worship their gods. If you turn from the Lord your God, you will become an evil nation; how then can you bring a blessing to all mankind, as the Lord promised to your father Abraham?"

" The Lord our God we will serve; and unto his voice we will hearken," the people had promised.

All went well for a time, but by degrees they began to make friends with the Canaanites, to marry them,

to copy their customs, and to worship their god, Baal, which was no god, but only a figure of wood or stone.

Even Gideon's father, Joash, had an altar to Baal in his garden.

Then trouble came. The Midianites began robbing and destroying the land; and how could they call upon God for help, the God whom they had forsaken? As for Baal, what use was he in their distress?

At last, in great humility, they cried to God to deliver them. Would he hear them, and answer their prayer?

As he worked, Gideon's thoughts were full of the sorrows of his people, and he did not know that a stranger was standing quietly beside him in the wine-press.

"The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour," said the visitor.

Gideon stopped threshing and looked up. "Oh, sir, if the Lord is with us, why is all this trouble come upon us?" he asked.

"Go, in this thy might, for the Lord has sent thee to save Israel from the hand of Midian," replied the angel messenger.

"Oh, sir!" cried Gideon, "who am I that I should save Israel? My family is the poorest in the tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

"Fear not," said the angel. "Throw down the altar of Baal which thy father hath, and build an altar unto the Lord thy God. And the Lord will save Israel by thy hand."

That night Gideon, accompanied by ten young

men, crept up to the altar of Baal, threw it to the ground, and built a new altar in its place.

The next morning, when this bold deed was discovered, and the men of the village saw Gideon's sacrifice still burning on his altar, they rushed to Joash, and demanded that his son should be put to death.

"If my son has offended Baal, let Baal come and punish him," said the old man. But the crowd waited in vain to see the revenge of an angry god, and Gideon's life was saved.

During the next few days, messengers hastened over the country, calling the men of the neighbouring tribes to join Gideon's army. They came in great numbers, thirty-two thousand of them; but the Midianite army, encamped in the valley, was greater.

At night God spoke to Gideon, and said: "The men that are with thee are too many; if I give them the victory, they will boast that their own strength has saved them from the enemy."

The following day Gideon proclaimed, "Whoever is afraid, let him return to his home," and twenty-two thousand men left the camp.

That night God told Gideon that his army was still too large.

Gideon then took his ten thousand men to a stream of water, to let them drink before the battle. He watched them carefully and noticed that most of them threw themselves down on the ground, put their mouths to the water, and drank greedily. The rest took up a little water in the palms of their hands to drink.

"By the three hundred men who lapped water from their hands will we save Israel," cried Gideon; "the others can return to their tents."

That night, when darkness fell and the enemy slept, Gideon placed his three hundred men around the Midianite camp. Each man had a trumpet in one hand, and a torch concealed in a pitcher in the other.

A little before midnight Gideon blew a blast on his trumpet, threw down his pitcher, held on high his flaming torch, and cried aloud, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!"

Immediately the three hundred men blew on their trumpets, the three hundred pitchers crashed to the ground, three hundred lighted torches flared around the camp, and three hundred voices shouted the battle-cry, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!"

To the Midianites, suddenly aroused, the noise appeared to come from a vast army, all round their camp, and they were terrified.

They dashed out of their tents, falling over one another and fighting each other in the darkness. They fled away to the mountains, pursued by the triumphant Israelites. They crossed the Jordan to their own land, and returned no more to trouble Israel.

Ruth

Three women were walking slowly along the road which led from Moab into the land of Canaan.

Naomi, the eldest of the three, looked sad and weary—this road was full of memories to her. Ten years ago she had travelled along it into the land of Moab, accompanied by her husband and two sons, looking for a new home, because there was a famine in Canaan.

Now her husband and sons were dead, and she was returning to Bethlehem, her old home, with her sons' Moabite wives.

When they reached the borders of Canaan, Naomi stopped, kissed her two daughters-in-law, and said: “Turn back again, my daughters, and go each to your mother's house; and may the Lord deal as kindly with you as you have with me.”

Orpah wept and kissed Naomi, then started unwillingly along the road to Moab; but Ruth, the younger of the two, clung to Naomi and would not leave her.

“Behold, Orpah is returning to her people and to her god,” said Naomi; “go with her, my daughter.”

But Ruth loved Naomi, and could not bear to let her go away alone. “Entreat me not to leave thee,” she pleaded, “for where thou goest I will go; thy people shall be my people, thy God shall be my God, and nothing but death shall part me and thee.”

So Naomi and Ruth journeyed on together; and they reached Bethlehem at the time of the barley harvest.

In the fields the reapers were cutting the ripe barley, and tying it into sheaves; a little group of women servants followed the men to pick up the long barley stalks which they dropped; and after them went a few poor women, gathering up the ears of barley which were still left on the field.

"Let me now go to the fields, and glean among the ears of corn," said Ruth. She knew that Naomi was very poor, and longed to help her.

"Go, my daughter," replied Naomi.

Early in the morning Ruth went to the fields, feeling very shy because she was a stranger in Bethlehem; she followed the reapers, and began to pick up the ears of barley from the ground.

Presently she noticed that the owner of the field, whose name was Boaz, had come near. She heard his greeting to the reapers, "The Lord be with thee," and she heard them all reply, "The Lord bless thee."

Boaz stopped to speak to his servants, then he approached Ruth. "Listen to me, my daughter," he said kindly; "go not to glean in any other field, but keep close by my maidens until the end of the harvest."

Ruth flung herself on the ground at his feet. "Why are you so good to me, seeing I am a stranger?" she asked.

"I know that you are the damsel who came back with Naomi from the land of Moab," replied Boaz. "I know how good you have been to her, in leaving

your home for her sake. May you be fully rewarded by the God of Israel, under whose protection you have come to live."

Ruth was cheered by these words, and went on gleaning until the men and maidens all gathered in a shady place to rest.

Boaz called to her. "Come hither and eat bread, and drink with my maidens," he said.

She sat with them, dipped bread into the vinegar as they did, and enjoyed the crisp roasted corn that Boaz gave her.

When the reapers returned to work, Ruth followed them, and soon had a big bundle of barley in her arms; she did not know that Boaz had instructed his men to let plenty fall near her.

In the evening Ruth beat the husks from her barley with a stick, tied up the grain in the end of her long veil, and went home to Naomi, delighted with her successful day.

"Where hast thou gleaned to-day?" asked Naomi.

"The man's name, who owned the fields, is Boaz," answered Ruth, "and he said to me, 'Keep fast by my maidens until the end of the harvest, and go not to any other fields'."

"Blessed be the Lord that thou hast found favour in his sight," cried Naomi, "for the man Boaz is our near kinsman."

Through the barley harvest, and the wheat harvest which followed, Ruth gleaned in the fields of Boaz, and received kindness all the time from the reapers and their master.

The goodness of Boaz did not end when the harvest was over. He bought for Naomi some fields which had belonged to her husband long ago; and he asked Ruth to be his wife.

Everyone was glad when Ruth and Boaz were married, and it was a happy day for Ruth when her baby boy was born. Naomi took the infant in her arms and showed him with pride to her neighbours.

“Blessed be the Lord, who has not left thee without a kinsman,” they cried, “for Ruth, thy daughter-in-law, who was better to thee than seven sons, has given thee her son to nurse. May the child comfort thine old age, and may his name, Obed, be famous in Israel.”



Samson

Samson was born at a time when the Israelites, oppressed by the strong and war-like Philistines, had no brave soldiers like Joshua or Gideon to lead them against their enemies.

The Israelites had again disobeyed God by mixing with strange nations, but when they prayed to him in their trouble he pitied them, and sent an angel messenger to Samson's mother.

"Thy son has been chosen by God to begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines," said the angel. "God will give him great strength to use in the service of his people."

God's blessing was therefore upon the child Samson from his infancy. His mother let his hair grow long as a sign that his life was to be spent for God; and every year his body became broader and more powerful, his muscles harder and stronger.

In spite of his mother's careful training, Samson grew up a very wilful boy. He went off to the land of the Philistines, and began to make friends with them; he even chose a wife from among them.

On one of his visits to the Philistine city, a young lion sprang, roaring, across his path. Samson had no weapon with which to attack it, so he killed it by the great strength of his own hands.

As he returned home he passed the body of the

lion, and saw, to his surprise, that some wild bees had put their honey in its mouth. He took the honeycomb and went on his way, thoughtfully eating the sweet wild honey.

Samson's parents were sorry when he told them of his proposed wedding. In vain they reminded him that Israelites were forbidden to marry strangers who did not worship the true God; he would not listen to them, and the wedding day was fixed.

Samson had told no one of his finding of the wild honey, but he did not forget it; and on the first day of the wedding feast, when every one was very merry, he cried to his friends: "I will give rich prizes to all who can answer this riddle—Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness!"

The wedding guests were puzzled; what did this strange riddle mean?

The seven days of feasting were nearly over, and they could not guess the answer, so they went secretly to Samson's bride. "Find out the meaning of the riddle for us," they pleaded.

With tears and entreaties Samson's wife begged him to show his love for her by telling her his riddle, and he told her of the honey he had found in the lion's mouth.

On the last day of the feast the guests went to Samson in triumph. "We know your riddle," they cried, "for what is sweeter than honey, and what is stronger than a lion?"

Samson was full of anger when he found out that

his wife had given away his secret, and he determined to have his revenge on the whole nation of Philistines. He made many daring raids into their country, and he was captured twice, but neither new ropes nor iron gates were strong enough to keep him a prisoner.

The Philistines knew they would have no peace until they had killed their bold enemy, so they offered a large sum of money to Delilah, a Philistine woman, if she could find out for them the secret of his strength.

Delilah enticed Samson into her house, and wearied him so much by her prayers and persuasions that at last he explained: "My hair grows long as a sign that I serve God; if my hair is cut off my promise to God will be broken, and I shall be weak as other men."

With great satisfaction Delilah then soothed Samson to sleep, and called up the waiting Philistines. They cut off his long hair, bound him with brass chains, and in triumph led him away to the prison.

There a most miserable time began for Samson. The cruel Philistines blinded him, and set him to grind corn in the prison, mocking him because he was now only strong enough to do a woman's work.

In the darkness and helplessness of his prison life Samson had time to think. He would never save his country from the Philistines now—he had wasted his life, wasted his God-given strength.

The Philistines were preparing a great feast in honour of Dagon, their god. "Our god has delivered Samson into our hands," they said.

The great temple of Dagon was crowded with

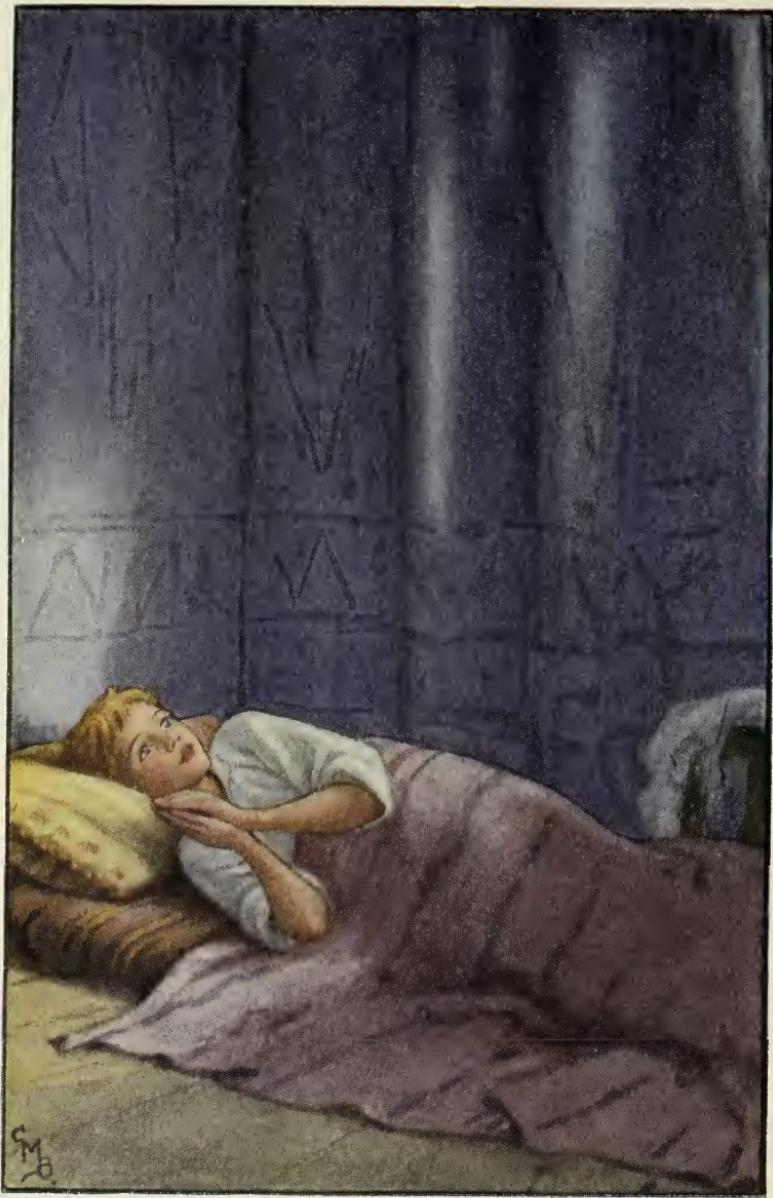
thousands of Philistines, both inside and upon the flat roof.

Into the midst of this shouting and excited throng Samson was led by his heavy chains. "Praise be to Dagon, our god, who has delivered our enemy into our hands!" they cried, and they laughed and jeered at poor blind Samson, who had been so strong and was now so helpless, standing there feeling for the pillars which supported the roof, that he might rest by them.

They did not know that Samson was praying in his heart, more earnestly than ever before. "Oh God, remember me, and strengthen me, I pray thee, this once more." He put an arm round each pillar. "Let me die with the Philistines!" he cried aloud, and he pulled and wrenched the huge pillars with all his might.

There were cries of terror as the great roof rocked and fell with a crash, crushing thousands of Israel's enemies under the ruins.

So ended the disappointing life of Samson. He did not accomplish the good work for which he was born, but he is still remembered as one of Israel's heroes.



“SPEAK, FOR THY SERVANT HEARETH”

E 964

(See page 95)

The Child Samuel

It was a feast-day in Shiloh, and the Israelites were assembled there to worship God, and to offer sacrifices before the tabernacle.

Among the crowd were Hannah and her husband. Hannah was not joining in the feasting and rejoicing, she was too unhappy. For years it had been her greatest wish to have a child, and now her women friends were mocking her because she had no son.

Presently she could bear their unkind words no longer; she left her husband's side, and made her way to the tabernacle.

Not heeding the old priest, who sat by the doorway, she went into the dimly lighted tent and, weeping bitterly, she began to pray: "O Lord of Hosts, if thou wilt indeed look upon my sorrow, and wilt give me a child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life."

Then Hannah noticed that Eli, the priest, had come near while she prayed. "My lord," she said, "I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord."

"Go in peace," replied the old priest, "and may the God of Israel grant thy petition."

Hannah left the tabernacle very much comforted. She returned home with her husband, and in time God answered her prayer.

How great was her joy when her baby son, her little Samuel, was born! But in all her pleasure Hannah did not forget her promise to give her boy to God; so when he was about four years old she took him with her to Shiloh.

She sought out the old priest in the tabernacle. "Oh, my lord, I am the woman whom you saw praying here," she said. "For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted my petition. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord as long as he lives."

Hannah left her little boy with Eli; he would now learn to serve the great God of Israel, and hard though it was to part with him, it was a joyful thing to Hannah that she had a son to give to such high service.

Samuel wore a little linen garment, and went in and out of the tabernacle with Eli, learning how to trim the lamps, to draw aside the heavy curtains, and keep everything clean and bright. Each year, at the time of the feast, his mother came to see him, and bring him a new coat which she had made.

Samuel grew fond of Eli, and soon discovered that he was greatly troubled by the bad conduct of his two sons. They were priests, but their wicked lives made them unfit for their holy work. One night, when his work was done, Samuel lay down to sleep in his small curtained room close to the tabernacle. Suddenly he heard a voice calling, "Samuel, Samuel!" He sprang up quickly and opened the curtains which separated his little room from Eli's. "Here am I," he said, "for you called me."

"I called not," replied the old man; "lie down again."

No sooner was Samuel lying in his place, than he heard the voice again. Surely it was Eli calling this time. He went to the priest's bedside. "Here am I, for you did call me," he said.

"I called not, my son," said Eli; "lie down again."

Samuel did not know that it was the voice of God that he had heard, and when he was called yet a third time, he rose up as before and went to Eli. "Here am I, for you did call me," he said.

"It must be that the Lord is speaking to the child," thought Eli to himself. "Go and lie down," he said to Samuel, "and if you are called again, you shall say, Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

Samuel, full of wonder, lay down on his blanket, and listened. Soon, in the darkness, he heard the voice again, "Samuel, Samuel!"

"Speak, for thy servant heareth," answered the boy. Samuel then heard these solemn words: "I have said that the family of Eli shall walk before me as priests for ever, but now, because of their wickedness, his sons shall both die; and I will raise up another family of faithful priests in Israel."

In the morning, when Samuel was opening the tabernacle curtains, he heard Eli's voice, and went to him, wondering how he could tell the poor old man this terrible message.

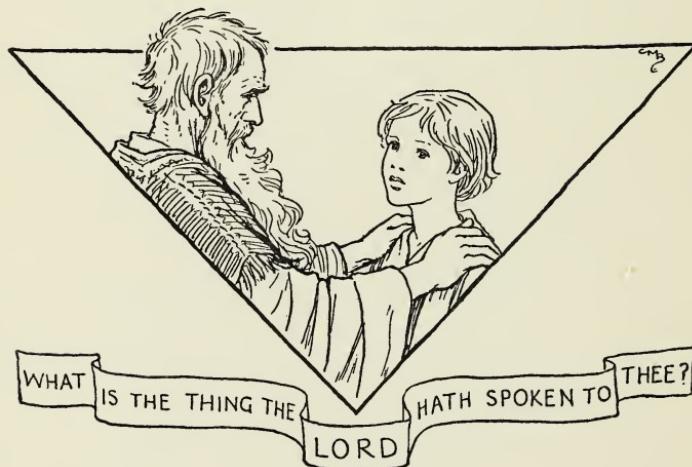
"What is the thing the Lord hath spoken to thee?" demanded Eli; "I pray thee, hide it not from me." So Samuel was obliged to tell him every word. "It is

the Lord," said Eli sadly. "Let him do what seemeth him good."

Some years later the Philistines made ready for battle against Israel. The sons of Eli took the golden Ark of God from its place in the tabernacle, and carried it into the camp, thinking its presence there might give Israel the victory.

Eli waited for news of the battle, and when a messenger came running from the camp saying, "The sons of Eli are dead and the Ark of God is taken!" the shock was too great for the old man, and he died the same day.

The people then turned to Samuel for guidance, for all believed that God had chosen him to be a prophet in Israel.



King Saul

The heads of the tribes of Israel came to the prophet Samuel with a very big request. "Make us a king, that we may be like the other nations," they said; "a king who will go out before us, and fight our battles."

Samuel was sorry when they asked this; he reminded them that God was their king, but they would not heed him. "Nay," they insisted, "but we will have a king over us."

Soon after this, therefore, Samuel called the tribes together, and spoke to them very solemnly. "You have rejected your God, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and saved you out of all your distresses, and you have said, Set a king over us. Now, I have hearkened to your voice, and made you a king."

Samuel then called for Saul, the son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Full of expectation, the Israelites watched the young man come shyly forward and stand beside the prophet. He was tall, the tallest man in the vast gathering, and he was strong and handsome; surely he would make them a splendid king.

"See him, whom the Lord has chosen, that there is none like him among the people," said Samuel; and the crowd, well pleased with the choice, gave a mighty shout of "God save the king!"

It was not long before enemies attacked Israel from every side. The young king gathered together an army of the most valiant men from each tribe, and led them into battle against the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, and the Amalekites.

Samuel loved the new king whom he had chosen, and watched his progress with many prayers. Before the battle with the Amalekites he went to Saul and said: "Thus saith the Lord, Go and smite Amalek, but bring away neither prisoners, nor spoil for yourselves—God's people shall take nothing from a heathen nation."

Saul and his splendid army won a great victory that day, and returned home in triumph leading the king of the Amalekites as a prisoner and driving flocks of the enemy's sheep and cattle.

"What meaneth this bleating of sheep, and this lowing of cattle in mine ears?" asked Samuel, when he came into the camp after the battle; "though thou wast little in thine own eyes, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed thee king over Israel, and commanded thee, 'Go and smite Amalek, but bring away neither prisoners nor spoil for yourselves.' Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord thy God?"

King Saul noticed the prophet's stern look, and answered hastily: "I have performed the commandment of the Lord. I have brought no prisoner—except the king of Amalek. Those sheep and oxen are only a few of the best which the people have brought to make a sacrifice to God."

"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice," said

Samuel. "Because you have disobeyed the voice of the Lord, he will take the kingdom of Israel from you and from your sons."

"I have sinned," cried Saul. "I pray thee, pardon my sin, for I disobeyed the voice of God to please my people."

It was hard for the gentle prophet to see Saul's distress, and to insist that he must bear the punishment for his disobedience; he left the camp very sorrowfully, grieving over the handsome young king. Presently God called to Samuel and said, "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill thy horn with oil, and go to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided a king among his sons."

Many years had passed since Ruth the Moabitess had lived in Bethlehem, and brought up her little son Obed there. Now Obed's son Jesse lived in their old home with his eight strong young sons, three of whom were soldiers in King Saul's army.

When Samuel the prophet arrived at the gates of Bethlehem, Jesse and the other men of the town met him. "Come out with me to offer a sacrifice to the Lord," said the prophet, and Jesse came with seven of his sons.

Samuel looked at the seven fine handsome young men. "Surely the Lord has chosen one of these to be the king over Israel," he thought.

But the Spirit of God spoke to Samuel and said: "The Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh

on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. I have not chosen one of these."

Samuel was puzzled. "Are these all of your sons?" he inquired of Jesse.

"There is still the youngest," replied Jesse, "but he is keeping the sheep."

A servant was sent in great haste to the hills to fetch the youngest son, and soon into the midst of the group waiting around the prophet came David.

What a splendid, healthy looking boy he was, with his rosy cheeks, bright eyes, and sun-tanned limbs! He stood before the prophet, and Samuel poured oil on his head in the sight of all his brothers. This was a sign, though they did not understand it yet, that God had chosen David to be the future king of Israel.





THE SHEPHERD BOY WHO BECAME KING

E 964

(See page 101)

David, the Shepherd Boy

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters,” sang David, as he sat on a sunny slope of the hills near Bethlehem, minding his father’s sheep.

How David loved his quiet shepherd’s life. Through the long days he could think deep thoughts and make lovely music, playing on his harp and singing to himself, with the lambs bleating, and the sheep grazing peacefully around him.

Since that day when the prophet Samuel had sent for him, and had anointed his head with oil, the boy’s thoughts had been all of the God who had made this lovely world. God seemed so near to him now—the blazing sun, the strong winds, and the unmoving hills, all spoke to him of the mighty changeless God, who watched over his people like a loving father.

Then one day a servant again came in haste to fetch David from the hills; he must bring his harp and come at once to King Saul, for the king was ill and very unhappy, and thought that music might soothe his troubled spirit.

It was thrilling to the shepherd boy to find himself in the presence of the great warrior king—but how stern the king looked, how gloomy. David took his harp and began to play; he sang his songs of the sky

and the hills, the cedar trees, the skipping lambs; and in time the sweetness of the music comforted the king's sad heart, so that he was able to rise and up return to his army.

The Israelites were encamped on the side of a hill, the Philistines were on an opposite hill; a small stream flowed along the valley between them, and both armies were ready for battle.

Each day the Philistines sent out their champion, Goliath of Gath, fully armed, with a shield-bearer before him, to stand on the hillside and shout across the valley: "Choose you a man, and let him come down to me! If he be able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I kill him, then shall you serve us!"

The armies of Israel trembled when they heard these words, and no man was brave enough to fight alone with the giant Philistine.

One morning David came into the camp to see his brothers. He heard Goliath's voice thundering across the valley, and asked his brothers who was going to answer the challenge. He was amazed to learn that the Israelites were all afraid. "I will go and fight with this Philistine," he said at once.

David was taken straight to the king's tent; but when King Saul saw the shepherd lad, he said gently: "You are not able to fight, for you are but a youth, and the Philistine is a man of war."

"When I kept my father's sheep, and a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and saved the lamb; and when the lion

sprang at me, I killed it," replied David eagerly. "The Lord who saved me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, he will deliver me from the hand of this heathen Philistine."

"Go, then," said the king, "and the Lord shall be with you."

David refused King Saul's offer of his own helmet and sword and shield, for they were too heavy for him. Unarmed, except for his staff, his shepherd's sling, and five smooth stones which he picked up from the stream, the lad went boldly forward to meet the giant.

Goliath was angry when he saw that the Israelites had sent only a shepherd boy to meet him. "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks and stones?" he shouted roughly.

"You come to me with a sword and a spear," cried David, "but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts! This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel."

David then ran fearlessly towards the giant; he slipped one of the small stones into his sling, and flung it with such skilful aim that it hit the Philistine, and sunk deep into his forehead, so that he fell heavily to the ground.

When the Philistine army saw that their champion was dead, they fled with cries of terror to their own country, leaving their tents behind them.

David found himself the hero of the people of Israel. He was not allowed to go back to his sheep. He was given a high position in the army, and everyone

praised him, and loved him, and sang songs about him.

Much of David's time was spent in the king's house, for the king's son Jonathan had become his greatest friend. The two young men had been attracted to one another the first time they met, and every day their friendship grew closer and stronger.

King Saul was still troubled at times with illness, and then nothing helped him so much as David's music; but one day when David was playing on the harp to him, some people passed along the street outside singing:

“Saul has slain thousands,
But David has slain tens of thousands.”

A sudden feeling of jealousy came upon the gloomy king, and the thought flashed into his mind, “What more can they do for David than give him the kingdom! Surely it is he who will be king in my place!” In his rage and disappointment he seized up a spear and hurled it towards David. He missed his aim, and the spear buried itself in the wall, while David fled from the room.

Jonathan was very much distressed when he heard what had happened, and it was a great grief to the two friends that it was no longer safe for David to be in Saul's house. They kissed one another and wept when they parted, and promised that whatever happened they would always be friends.

David the King

For some years David lived among the hills, wandering from place to place, hiding in woods and caves from King Saul, who was out with an army searching for him, to kill him. A company of young men had joined David, and shared his rough, adventurous life.

One day a man, ragged, tired, and dusty, came in great haste and flung himself at David's feet.

"From whence are you come?" asked David.

"I am escaped from the camp of Israel," replied the messenger. "There has been a great battle. The Israelites fled from before the Philistines, and both Saul and his son Jonathan are dead."

His danger was over, and David was safe from pursuit, but his first feeling was of deep sorrow, for Jonathan was his dearest friend. "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan," he cried. "Very pleasant hast thou been to me; thy love for me was wonderful!" And he mourned for the loss of Saul and Jonathan.

David knew that long ago, when he was only a shepherd boy, God had chosen him to be a king; so when the heads of the twelve tribes came to him, and asked him to reign over them, he let them crown him in Hebron; and he became king over all the land of Israel.

Then began a time of great happiness and pros-

perity for the people of Israel. With their beloved hero as their leader, they drove the Philistines away from their land, and God gave them rest from their enemies.

David chose Jerusalem, a city on a hill, to be his fortress; and Hiram, King of Tyre, showed his friendliness by sending carpenters, with fragrant cedar wood from the forest of Lebanon, to build David a house there.

But Jerusalem was to be more than a fortress, it was to be a Holy City. David ordered that a tabernacle of rich curtains should be made there, and the Ark of God placed within it, as a sign that God's presence was in the midst of the Kingdom of Israel.

On the appointed day a great crowd of people assembled at Jerusalem to see a wonderful procession coming up the hill towards the city gate. There were priests in splendid robes, carrying on their shoulders the golden Ark; there were musicians playing on trumpets, cymbals and harps; there were singers and dancers, and all joined in shouting aloud with great joy, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in!"

When David was established in his new home, it occurred to him that his house was far more costly and beautiful than the tent in which the Ark of God was kept. He sent for Nathan, a prophet of God. "See now," said the king; "I dwell in a house of cedar wood, but the Ark of God dwelleth within curtains; it is in my heart to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God."

"Thou hast been a warrior, and hast shed much blood in battle, therefore thou shalt not build a house unto the Lord," replied the prophet; "but a son shall be born to thee, whose name shall be called Solomon. He shall be a man of peace, he shall sit upon the throne of Israel, and he shall build the house of the Lord thy God."

David was disappointed, but he began to collect gold and silver and precious stones in large quantities for the great building which he would never see.

King David had many sons; but in all Israel there was no more handsome young man than his third son, Absalom. He was a favourite with the people of Israel; his beautiful face and charming ways won him friends wherever he went. His father was proud of the splendid young prince, and it was a bitter blow to him when news was brought to Jerusalem: "Absalom has stolen the hearts of the men of Israel, and they have crowned him king in Hebron."

Each day more and more men joined Absalom, until he had a strong army, with which he marched towards Jerusalem. There was nothing for David to do but gather together his army, and send it out to battle against his son. "Deal gently, for my sake, with the young man, even with Absalom," commanded the king, as he watched his captains leading their men out to the forest of Ephraim.

The fighting was fierce that day; Absalom's men were scattered by the king's soldiers, and Absalom himself, separated from the rest, rode through the forest in the evening on his mule. As he rode, his long

waving hair became entangled in the twisted branches of an oak tree, and the mule went away from under him, leaving him hanging there. Later when King David's men found him, he was dead.

"Tidings, my lord the king; for the Lord hath delivered thee this day from thine enemies!" cried the messenger who ran in with news of the battle.

"Is the young man Absalom safe?" was the king's eager inquiry.

"The enemies of my lord the king be as that young man is," answered the slave solemnly.

The king understood, and his grief was terrible to see.

"O my son Absalom!" he cried, "would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" And the victory was turned to sorrow, for Israel mourned in sympathy with their beloved king.

King David's long and eventful life was nearly ended. He could look back over the years and think of his many victories, his failures, his joys, and his bitter troubles. He knew that when he had done right, and even when he had sinned, God had been near him; as near in the fortress of Jerusalem as on the peaceful hills; and though he grew old and weary, he could still sing:

"The Lord is my strength and my shield.
My heart hath trusted in him, and I am helped.
Therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth, and with
my song will I praise him."

King Solomon

“ Solomon, my son,” said King David to the young prince, “ the Lord will establish you upon the throne of this kingdom; he will give peace unto Israel in your days, and you shall build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem,” and he displayed to the wondering eyes of his son the splendid store of silver and gold which he had prepared.

Some years later, when King David was old, he gathered together the princes of Israel, and said: “ Solomon, my son, is yet young, and the work is great; for the house which he will build is not for man, but for the Lord God. I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God; who then among you will give an offering this day unto the Lord?” Then all the princes and people of Israel brought their treasures, gold and silver and precious stones, and offered them joyfully and willingly to God. “ Blessed be thou, O God of Israel, our father!” cried the old king. “ All that is in the heaven and earth is thine. All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.” And the whole company bowed their heads and worshipped God.

Solomon’s first act after his coronation was to go to Gibeon to offer a sacrifice; he knew that he could not rule his great kingdom without the guidance of God.

That night, after the offering of the sacrifice, God appeared to Solomon in a dream, and said, “ Ask what I shall give thee.”

“ O Lord my God,” answered Solomon, “ thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father, and I am but a child in the midst of this people. Give thy servant therefore an understanding heart, to judge between good and evil.”

This reply was pleasing to God, and Solomon heard his voice saying, “ Behold, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart, so that there hath been none like thee before. I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour; and if thou wilt keep my commandments, then I will lengthen thy days.”

Solomon woke from his dream, and returned to Jerusalem, where all were amazed at the wisdom and sound judgment of the young king.

Hiram, the King of Tyre, hearing that Solomon was to build a Temple for his God, sent large quantities of cedar and cypress wood, and offered skilled workmen to help with the building.

Solomon appointed officers to superintend the work, and the great task was begun.

There was never such activity heard or seen in the land before; the hammering of stone, the sawing of wood, the beating of metal, all the skilled workers doing their best, with unskilled labourers hurrying to and fro to wait upon them.

But in Jerusalem all was quiet—no sound of hammer, saw, or axe was heard here. As each portion of the

Temple was ready, it was brought into the city and put silently in its place.

After seven years of hard work the Temple was finished. It was of stone, lined throughout with wood. The great pillars were of cedar wood, decorated with carved flowers. Angels and palm trees were carved upon the doors, and all the woodwork inside the Temple was overlaid with pure gold. There was a Holy Place shut off from the rest of the Temple by fine linen curtains, dyed blue and purple and crimson, and embroidered with golden angels; this was to contain the Ark of God. The pillars of the porch were of bright brass, ornamented with a pattern of pomegranates and lilies; there was a golden altar, and lamps and candlesticks all of solid gold.

Then King Solomon assembled all the princes and heads of the tribes, to join in the procession of priests, and bring the Ark of God into the Temple.

To the sound of trumpets, cymbals, and harps, the priests carried the Ark through the golden doors, and set it within the curtains of the Holy Place. The people flocked into the Temple after the priests, and all joined in singing, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever!"

The king then stood before the golden altar, in the sight of all the people; he stretched out his hands towards heaven and prayed aloud: "O Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like thee in the heaven or in the earth. Will God in very deed dwell with men? Behold, the heavens cannot contain thee, how much less this house which I have builded! Yet, O Lord my

God, hearken unto the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee, that thine eyes may be open towards this house day and night. And if thy people Israel shall pray before thee in this house, then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and when thou hearest, forgive."

When King Solomon's prayer was ended, the glory of the Lord filled all the Temple; and the people bowed themselves with their faces to the golden pavement, worshipping God.

One day gorgeously dressed strangers with laden camels were seen approaching the gates of Jerusalem; they were from Sheba, and were escorting their queen on a visit to King Solomon. She had heard in her own land of his riches and his wisdom, and had come to see whether it were all true.

King Solomon graciously received her, and showed her all the glories of Jerusalem; he showed her his great ivory throne with twelve carved lions on its steps; he entertained her to dinner at his own table, on which every dish and drinking cup was of pure gold; he told her of his great ships which went to foreign lands to fetch gold and silver, ivory to decorate his palace, and peacocks to walk in his gardens; he answered all her questions, and accepted the gifts of choice spices, gold, and jewels which she had brought.

At last the Queen of Sheba said: "It was a true report which I heard of thy acts and of thy wisdom, and behold the half was not told me. Happy are these thy servants which stand before thee, and hear thy wisdom; and blessed be the Lord thy God, who

delighteth in thee," and she rode away, marvelling at all she had seen.

Can that be King Solomon, surrounded by women in strange foreign garments, standing before an altar, burning incense, bowing himself, and calling upon the name of Molech, the god of the Ammonites?

Yes; in his old age, King Solomon turned away from the God who had given him so much wisdom and honour, and to please the foreign princesses whom he had brought into Jerusalem, he went out with them and worshipped their gods.

One night Solomon heard God's voice for the last time—the voice that he had heard so long before at Gibeon—saying to him, "Because thou hast not kept my commandment, and thou hast gone after strange gods, I will surely take thy kingdom from thy son. And yet for the sake of my servant David, I will not take all the kingdom from him, he shall be king over two tribes."

Solomon continued in his evil ways, heedless of the trouble that he was bringing to the land. How sad an ending to such a glorious reign!

Elijah at Sarepta

The whole land of Israel was suffering from a terrible drought—for many months there had been neither rain nor dew. The streams and rivers were drying up, the corn in the fields was burnt brown by the blazing sun, and bread was very scarce.

Since the time when King Solomon had turned away from God to worship the gods of the heathen nations, things had gone from bad to worse. The ten northern tribes of Israel were ruled by the wicked King Ahab, while the remaining two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, which had been faithful to the son of Solomon, formed a separate little kingdom.

Ahab, king of Israel, had married Jezebel, a princess from the neighbouring kingdom of Sidon; she brought with her into his city of Samaria many heathen priests, and introduced the worship of her god Baal into Israel.

Elijah, a prophet of God, came suddenly into the king's evil court, with a very stern message: "As the Lord, the God of Israel, liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these three years, but according to my word."

The people of Israel were frightened when they heard this; looking at the cloudless blue sky, they knew the prophet's words were true, and that the greatest disaster that could befall their country was upon them. Worst of all, they knew that they were suffering for their

own sin. Why had they forsaken the God who had been so loving and bountiful? What good was Baal to them now, in their trouble?

The cruel queen Jezebel was not afraid, she was angry. She ordered out the king's soldiers to seek through the land for Elijah, to kill him.

But the time had not come for Elijah to die. God had more work yet for his bold prophet to do; so Elijah hid by a brook from the soldiers, until the stream dried up; then, guided by God, he went northwards, to the country of Sidon.

At the gate of Sarepta, a little town in Sidon, a poor woman was picking up sticks. She saw approaching her a weary-looking man, dressed in a rough garment of camel's hair, with a leather girdle, and she guessed that he had come from the land of Israel. She was in great trouble, but when he asked her for a drink of water she left her sticks, and started off at once to get it for him.

"Bring me also a morsel of bread in thine hand," Elijah called after her; but the woman turned back. "As the Lord thy God liveth, I have no bread," she said; "I have but a handful of meal in the barrel, and a little oil in the cruse; and behold, I am gathering sticks that I may go in and bake a little cake for myself and my son. After that we shall have to die, for I can get no more."

"Fear not," replied Elijah, "go and do as thou hast said, but make me first a little cake, and bring it to me, and afterwards make for thyself and thy son. For thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel—The

barrel of meal shall not be empty, nor the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

The woman hurried home to do the prophet's bidding, for if his words were true, she and her little boy would not die of hunger; they would have enough to eat while the famine lasted.

The months went by, and still no rain came to water the thirsty earth. People were starving for want of bread and water, but the widow of Sarepta and her little son had just enough meal in their barrel, and oil in their cruse for each day's need; and the prophet Elijah stayed with them and shared their humble food.

One day when Elijah entered the house, he found great sorrow there. The poor woman sat weeping and clasping her boy in her arms. He had been taken ill that day. She had done all she could for him but he had only grown worse, until his spirit left his body, and he died.

"Why did you ever come here, O man of God!" she cried as soon as she saw the prophet; "did you come to punish me for my past sins by killing my son?"

Elijah was sorry for the mother's grief. "Give me thy son," he said gently. She allowed him to take the child from her, and he carried him up to his own small room, and laid him on the bed.

The prophet bowed himself three times over the little body lying quietly there, so that his strong warm hands touched the child's cold ones, while he prayed very earnestly to God and said, "O Lord my God,



ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW'S SON

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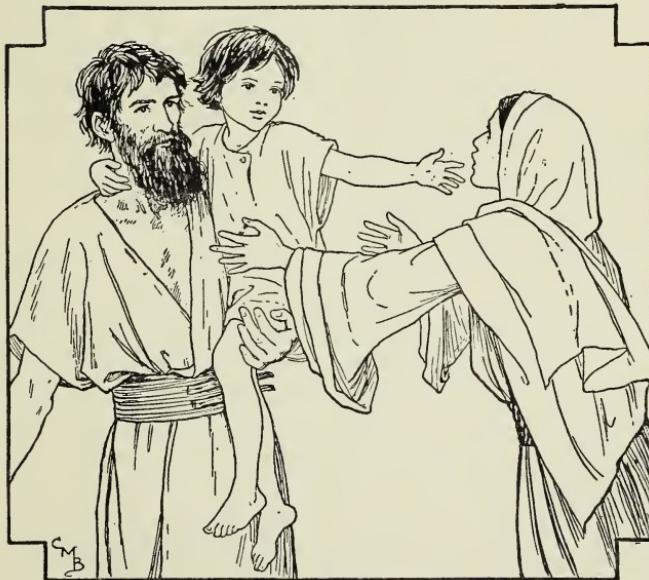
(See page 117)

I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again."

At these words the little boy awoke, as from a sleep; his spirit had returned.

Elijah lifted him from the bed and carried him to his poor unhappy mother. "See," he said, "thy son liveth!"

No one but the true God could do such a wonderful thing as this! "Now I know that thou art indeed a man of God," cried the widow, as she held her living son tightly in her arms; "and the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth!"



Elijah and the Prophets of Baal

Three long years went by, and no shower of rain nor drop of dew came to refresh the thirsty land of Israel. Then Elijah left Sarepta, for God said to him: “Go, show thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth.”

King Ahab was away from his city, seeking through the country for any green grass for his horses, or stream which had still a little water in it; suddenly his servant said, “Behold, Elijah is here!” and Ahab found himself standing face to face with the prophet once more.

The king was so astonished that he could only exclaim, “Is it you, you troubler of Israel?”

Elijah had no fear of the wicked king. “I have not troubled Israel,” he replied boldly; “you and your father’s house have brought trouble by forsaking the commandments of God and following Baal. Send now and gather me all Israel on Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal, even four hundred and fifty of them, and those who eat at Jezebel’s table.”

What did Elijah mean to do? Ahab did not know, but he hastened to obey the prophet’s command, hoping that it might lead to the end of the terrible drought.

Early on the morning of the day appointed, therefore, King Ahab, with a large crowd of people from each of

the ten tribes, and four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal in gorgeous robes, assembled on a plateau among the mountains of Carmel. Facing them, alone, in his rough camel's-hair coat, stood the bold, stern prophet.

Elijah began to speak so that all could hear him. "How long halt ye between two opinions?" he cried. "If the Lord be God, follow him, and if Baal, then follow him." No one answered; they did not know what to say, so Elijah continued: "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them prepare a sacrifice for their god, but put no fire under it—I will build an altar and prepare a sacrifice unto the Lord, and put no fire under it. Then you shall call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the Lord. The God that shall answer by sending fire to burn up his sacrifice, he shall be the true God."

The people listened with great attention, and were content with this plan. "It is well spoken," they said.

The prophets of Baal made ready their altar, placed a sacrifice upon it, and began to call: "O Baal, hear us! O Baal, answer us!" From early morning until midday they danced and shouted around their altar, but there was no voice, nor any that answered.

By the afternoon the waiting people began to be impatient—why did not Baal send down fire upon his altar?

Elijah, who was looking on in solemn satisfaction, came nearer and spoke to the excited prophets. "Cry louder," he advised, "perhaps the god is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awaked."

The prophets of Baal felt that they were being laughed at, and they grew desperate. All the afternoon they leaped and shouted and even cut themselves with knives, but still there was no answer.

The sun was getting low in the western sky when Elijah spoke again. "Come near unto me," he said.

The people crowded round him. They watched him lift twelve large stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel, and pile them together to make an altar. They saw him dig a trench around it, and place his sacrifice upon it. They looked in surprise while at his command water from a spring was poured over the altar so that it ran down and filled the trench.

It was then the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice in the Temple at Jerusalem, and there was an expectant silence while Elijah stood by his altar and prayed aloud: "O Lord, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel."

Immediately lightning flashed from the sky, the sacrifice burst into flames, and all the people fell on their faces, saying: "The Lord, he is God! The Lord, he is God!"

The multitude then rose to their feet and pursued the prophets of Baal down the mountain side. Elijah and his young servant climbed to the top of Carmel, where the prophet bowed himself to the ground in prayer.

Presently he looked up and said to his servant, "Go now, look towards the sea."

Seven times the lad gazed out across the mountains

and over the great sea beyond, and at last he cried,
“Behold, there ariseth a cloud out of the sea—but only
the size of a man’s hand.”

A strong west wind then began to blow, clouds
came quickly up from the sea till all the sky was black,
and soon a welcome heavy rain was falling.

King Ahab hastened down from the mountain, and
drove in his chariot through the storm, back to his
palace and his queen.



Elisha and the Syrian Army

Over the hills from Gilgal to Bethel, from Bethel down to Jericho, from Jericho across the river Jordan into his own country of Gilead, went the old prophet Elijah.

His work in the world was nearly done, and he was visiting for the last time the places where he had worshipped God, and where for some years he had been teaching the ways of God to groups of young students—sons of the prophets, they were called.

Elijah was accompanied by Elisha, the man whom he had chosen to take his place as prophet of God in Israel.

“Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken from thee,” said Elijah, as they were nearing the end of their journey.

Elisha knew what he needed. “I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me,” he said. How else could he hope to carry on the prophet’s work?

“Thou hast asked a hard thing,” replied Elijah; “nevertheless, if thou seest me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee.”

They strolled on together in the golden evening light, the hills of Gilead glowing red from the setting sun.

Suddenly in the shining sky there appeared fiery horses and a flaming chariot. “My father, my father!”

cried Elisha, “the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!”

A violent wind sprang up, the fiery chariot flashed by, and Elijah was gone—perhaps to greater work awaiting him in the lovely land of Paradise.

Elisha stood gazing into the sky until the glory had died away, then he slowly turned and picked up the old prophet’s cloak which had fallen from him—all that was left to him of his beloved master.

Back went Elisha to Jericho, where the sons of the prophets came out to meet him. “The spirit of Elijah doth rest upon Elisha!” they cried, and they bowed to the ground before him.

It happened, when a son of Ahab was king in Samaria, that the king of Syria came with his army into Israel. He moved his camp from place to place, planning surprise attacks upon the Israelites, and trying to catch them unprepared. But, every time, the Israelites had been warned of his coming and had moved away.

It greatly perplexed and worried the king of Syria. Who could have told the Israelites his plans? Had he a traitor in his own camp who was giving his secrets away to the enemy?

“Will you not show me which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?” he asked his servants.

“Nay, my lord, O King,” replied one of his men, “but it is Elisha the prophet who tells the king of Israel the words spoken in secret in our camp; and behold, he is living in Dothan.”

A few days later, therefore, when Elisha's young servant got up early in the morning, he was amazed to see the hills around the little city of Dothan crowded with soldiers, horses and chariots. They must have come during the night! Could they be the army of Syria? Were they looking for his master Elisha?

He ran back to the little house, full of fear, and told the prophet of the terrifying sight he had seen. "Alas, my master, how shall we do?" he cried.

"Fear not," answered his master calmly, "for there are more with us than with them."

Seeing that the young man was puzzled by these words, Elisha looked towards heaven and said, "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see;" and at once a wonderful sight appeared. The mountains around were thronged with shining fiery horses and chariots, in far greater numbers than the chariots of Syria—and the servant understood that God had sent the mighty hosts of heaven to guard his prophet.

The Syrian leaders were at the gate of Dothan, asking for Elisha; and the prophet, knowing what he would do, and praying to God that they might not recognize him, went up to them and said: "This is not the way, neither is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek."

Never dreaming who was their guide, nor where he was leading, the whole army of Syria followed Elisha up and down the mountain paths, and right to the city of Samaria.

Not until the king of Israel came out of his palace and stood before them, did they realize what a trick

had been played on them. They had allowed themselves to be led right into their enemy's stronghold! They were prisoners in the hands of the king of Israel and his prophet! How blind they had been! But what was the king saying to Elisha? "My father, shall I smite them, shall I smite them?"

Anxiously they listened for the reply—they knew that their lives depended on the prophet's word. And the answer came back at once. "Would you kill those whom you had taken captive in battle? No—do not smite them—set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and return to their master."

A good meal was prepared and set before the astonished Syrians, and when they had eaten enough, the king sent them away.

Their expedition had failed, the prophet of Israel had been cleverer than they; but they had a strange tale to tell on their return to Syria. The king of Syria was so impressed with the wisdom and kindness of Elisha, that he sent his army no more into the land of Israel.

Naaman the Syrian

When the armies of Syria returned from one of their raids into the kingdom of Israel, Naaman, the captain of the Syrian host, took back with him a little Israelite girl to wait upon his wife.

Everything was new and strange to the young slave girl, carried away so suddenly from her home and people; but in time she grew accustomed to her work in the big luxurious house among the numbers of Syrian servants; and she became fond of the sad-faced lady, her mistress.

She learnt that Naaman, her master, was a brave soldier, honoured in the army and trusted by his king; and she could not understand the feeling of trouble which hung like a cloud over the household.

Then one day the little maid discovered the secret. Naaman had caught that terrible disease, leprosy. No wonder her mistress was unhappy! No cure could be found for the dread illness, and Naaman must only get worse until he died.

No cure? No, not in Syria, but away in Israel lived the prophet Elisha—with the help of his God he had done many wonders; might he not even cure a leper? But what could a little captive maid do? Would anyone heed her if she told of the prophet far off in her own country?

The next time the little Israelite was summoned

to her mistress' presence, and stood awaiting her orders, she took courage and ventured to speak. "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria," she said timidly, "then would he recover him of his leprosy."

Eagerly the Syrian lady listened, and questioned the maid further—quickly she sent word to her husband to tell him of the new idea. Hope sprang up in their sad hearts.

In haste preparations were made for a journey into Israel; and Naaman set off with a noble escort of chariots, horses and servants. One chariot was laden with gold and silver and handsome garments for the prophet; and Naaman carried a letter of introduction from his king addressed to the king of Israel.

Having presented the letter at the king's palace in Samaria, and being directed to the little house where Elisha lived, Naaman drove up in state to the humble dwelling. After a few moments of anxious waiting, the door was opened by the prophet's servant. "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thou shalt be cured of thine illness," he said; and quietly closed the door again.

Was this the end of all Naaman's hopes and expectations? Why had the prophet not come out himself, and laid his hand on the sore places to cure them? Why had he not called upon his God for mercy on the leper? It was an insult to send a message by a servant to him, Naaman, the captain of the Syrian host! As to the river Jordan! He would never wash in that mean and narrow stream!

Full of rage and disappointment, he turned to his servants. "Are not the rivers of Syria better than all the waters of Israel?" he cried. "May I not wash in them and be clean? Drive home at once!"

"But, my master," ventured one of his men, "if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith, Wash and be clean?"

The man was right—perhaps it were foolish not even to try the cure.

The chariots were turned in the direction of the river—Naaman flung off his coat, and, full of doubt and anxiety, he stepped down the bank. Seven times he dipped himself in the waters of Jordan, and as he came up the last time he saw to his amazement and joy that the ugly sore places had disappeared—his flesh was as smooth and clean as a child's.

Back to Elisha's house galloped the horses; Naaman was eager to offer his thanks and his gifts to the prophet.

"Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel," he said, when Elisha appeared at the door; "therefore, I pray thee, take a present of thy servant." But he could not persuade Elisha to accept either the money or the garments which he had brought, for it was not his skill but the power of God which had cured the leprosy.

In her home in Syria, Naaman's wife and her little maid were waiting for his return.

How they hoped and prayed—the lady hardly daring

to expect a cure, the young Israelite full of faith in the power of her God and his prophet.

What a day of rejoicing it was when Naaman drove home in his chariot and told the glad news.

But what were those two heavy sacks which were lifted from the chariot? They were two loads of earth from Israel—and every day Naaman would stand upon it to pray to the God of Israel, and to offer his thanks for the great and wonderful benefit he had received.



Prophets' Warnings

Very slowly, for hundreds of years, God had been making himself known to his people.

Gradually men began to see that he was leading them, as a shepherd leads his sheep. They began to learn that he loved them as a father loves his own children.

They knew his promise to their forefather Abraham that through them all the nations of the world should be blessed—and yet they were like disobedient, wilful children, who chose to go their own way; and so they brought trouble upon themselves, and hindered God's plan for the world.

But even in the darkest time, when men and women had forgotten, or turned away from God, there was always some man of prayer, trying to live a good life, to whom the Spirit of God could speak. These men were the prophets, who, with God's thoughts in their hearts, and his words on their lips, could bring his message to the sinful people.

It was when the kingdom of Israel was full of wickedness, the king and people living idle, selfish lives, worshipping heathen gods, and heedless of an enemy which was preparing to attack them, that the prophet Amos left his flocks in the wilderness of Tekoa, and journeyed to the royal house of the king of Israel, burning to warn the foolish people of the danger which

threatened them; longing to turn them to God while yet they had time.

"Thus saith the Lord," he cried, "an adversary there shall be, even round about the land. Thy palaces shall be spoiled, and thou shalt surely be led away captive. I know how mighty are thy sins, but seek good and not evil, and the Lord will be gracious unto thee."

Would these careless, pleasure-loving people heed a simple herdsman's words? No, with scorn they drove him from the court. "Go, flee away to Judah, and prophesy there!" they cried.

When the Assyrian hosts came pouring into their land, it was too late to turn to God for help.

The miserable people were taken away captive into Assyria; their beautiful palaces were destroyed, their royal city of Samaria was given to strangers, and they never saw their own country again.

Under the guidance of good King Hezekiah the kingdom of Judah was enjoying a time of prosperity. The people were trying once more to serve God; they were offering sacrifices in the Temple, and keeping the feast of the Passover which had been neglected for many years.

But trouble was at hand. The king of Assyria, who had captured the Israelites so easily, surrounded Jerusalem with his army, and sent a letter to King Hezekiah —"Let not thy God deceive thee, saying: 'Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.' Behold what the king of Assyria has done to other lands

by destroying them utterly—and shalt thou be delivered?"

King Hezekiah took the insulting letter straight to the Temple and spread it out before God. "O Lord of Hosts," he prayed, "thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. Therefore, O Lord, save us from the hand of the king of Assyria, that all may know that thou art the Lord."

The answer to this earnest prayer was brought to the king by Isaiah, a nobleman who was also a prophet. "Thus saith the Lord, 'The king of Assyria shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, for I will save this city, for David my servant's sake.'

The next morning the king of Assyria discovered that thousands of his soldiers had died in the night. Who could have smitten them so secretly? Was it the angel of the God whom he had scorned? He could not tell—but he withdrew his remaining men, and came no more to trouble Israel.

Thus were the Jews safe for a time; but after the reign of the good king Hezekiah there were some evil kings who led the weak and faithless people away from God again. The prophet Isaiah was very grieved to see this; he knew the people would have to suffer for their sin. He entreated them to give up their sinful ways before it were too late. "Wash you, make you clean," he said. "Cease to do evil, learn to do well. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

The people of Judah paid no more attention to the words of the gentle Isaiah than the Israelites had done to Amos the herdsman.

Then Jeremiah, a sterner prophet, appeared in Jerusalem. Perhaps they would listen to him. He summoned the leading Jews to go with him to the house of a potter, who stood all day at his wheel making vessels of clay.

Silently they stood round watching the potter moulding the clay, saw him stop the wheel and lift up the bowl which he had made. It was not a good shape, so the potter broke it in pieces and put the clay on the wheel again, until his skilful hands had formed it into a perfect bowl.

"O men of Judah," said the prophet; "as clay in the hand of a potter, so are you in the hand of God. If you do not please him, he can destroy you. He can build you up again a perfect nation."

Another day Jeremiah walked in Jerusalem, wearing across his shoulders a wooden yoke such as oxen wear when harnessed to a plough.

"O men of Judah," he cried; "the king of Babylon will come upon you to make you his servants. Submit to him, even as an ox bears his yoke and obeys his master. If you rebel against him, he will carry you away captive, and destroy Jerusalem."

Among the crowd was a false prophet, who deceived the people, saying that he had messages from God. He ran up to Jeremiah, snatched the yoke from his neck, and broke it in two, shouting: "Thus saith the Lord, Even so will I break the yoke of Babylon in two years!"

"The Lord hath not sent thee, thou makest the people to trust in a lie," said Jeremiah, but the false prophet's words pleased the crowd, and they turned in anger upon Jeremiah and cast him into prison.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was the strongest king in the world at that time. He was adding to his kingdom by conquering other nations and making them serve him. When he reached Jerusalem, the Jews refused to submit to him, or own him as their master. They tried in vain to defend their city against him; his army broke down their walls and rushed in.

Nebuchadnezzar had no mercy on men, women, or children—some he killed, others he sent captive into Babylon; he took all the treasures from the Temple; he destroyed by fire all the houses and palaces, and even the House of God itself; only Jeremiah and a few of the poorest people were left to mourn over the ruins of their city.

Jeremiah had done his best to warn the people, but they would not learn the lessons he tried to teach. Now they were broken like a potter's vessel; their city was destroyed because they had refused the yoke of Babylon; now in bitter sorrow they would repent of their sins.

The prophet knew that God would have pity on them in their trouble, and would at last bring them back to Jerusalem, a wiser and stronger nation. So he sent a comforting message to the unhappy captives: "Hear ye the word of the Lord," he wrote. "Ye shall pray unto me and I will hear you. Ye shall seek me and find me. And after seventy years I will cause you to return to this place."

The Jews in Babylon

Hundreds of miles from their beloved Jerusalem the unhappy Jews worked for Nebuchadnezzar, their new master, by the rivers of Babylon.

They wept when they thought of their ruined city, and three times a day they turned towards the west, where Jerusalem lay, and prayed God to deliver them from their captivity.

God, who listens to every real prayer, sent messages of comfort to the sorrowful people by his prophets—wonderful messages, full of hope of a joyful return to Jerusalem, and promise of a heavenly city beyond, to which all nations should come.

King Nebuchadnezzar chose four young Jewish men, Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego, and Daniel to live in his palace and study all the learning of Babylon. They learned quickly, and were so full of wisdom that the king soon gave them high positions in the government of his land.

One day a vast crowd of princes, governors, soldiers, musicians, and leading men of Babylon were assembled on the plain of Dura, near the royal city. It was a gay crowd, with coloured eastern garments, bright armour, and curious musical instruments flashing in the sunlight; and towering above all, a great golden image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

A herald stepped forward and proclaimed loudly:

“ O people, nations, and languages, at what time ye shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye shall fall down and worship the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. Whoso falleth not down, shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace.”

The silence which followed this announcement was suddenly broken by the clash of music, and at once the mighty company bowed themselves to the ground before the great golden image.

Who are the three young men who stand upright among that prostrate crowd? They have disobeyed the king’s command! The furnace must be prepared! Messengers ran quickly to the royal palace. “ O king, live for ever,” they said, bowing before Nebuchadnezzar. “ There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—who did not worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”

The king, in a fury, sent for the three young Jews. “ For what purpose did you not fall down and worship my golden image?” he demanded, “ for if ye worship not ye shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace—and then who is that god that shall deliver you?”

“ O Nebuchadnezzar,” answered the young men boldly, “ the God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace—and he will deliver us. But if not, be it known unto thee that we will not worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”

“ Bind these men, and cast them into the furnace!”

cried the angry king, “ and let the fire be seven times hotter than before!”

Fully dressed, in their coats and turbans, the three men were bound and thrown into the fire.

Eagerly the king watched them. Suddenly he leaned forward as close to the furnace as he could, peering into the fierce blaze. “ Did we not cast three men into the fire?” he exclaimed. “ Behold, I see four men, walking unbound in the midst of the flames! And the fourth is like an angel of God! O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, servants of the most high God, come forth!”

The courtiers crowded round and saw that the fire had not hurt the brave young Jews. Their hair and their clothes were not even singed.

“ Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants who trusted in him,” said Nebuchadnezzar; and he promoted them to still higher work in his kingdom.

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As years went by, a change came to the kingdom of Babylon; the power of the king was weakening, and his enemy, the king of the Medes and Persians, was gaining strength.

One night, during a grand feast in the palace at Babylon, when the guests were drinking wine from golden cups brought from the Temple at Jerusalem, the king of Persia attacked the city with his mighty army, and added Babylon to his Persian Empire.

The new king lost no time in appointing governors

to rule his captured lands, and he set Daniel the prophet over them all. This caused jealousy among the Persian princes, and they made up their minds to get rid of this Jew who was in such favour with their king.

"O king, live for ever," they said. "We have consulted together to make a royal decree that whoever shall pray to any god, but only to thee, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, sign the writing, that it be a law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be altered."

When Daniel heard of this decree, and knew that the king had signed it, he saw that it was a plot against himself; but he went as usual to his open window in the morning and evening and at noonday, to pray with his face towards Jerusalem.

Below the window the princes were watching.

In triumph they hastened to the king. "That Daniel, which is one of the captives from Judah, regardeth not the decree thou hast signed," they said; "he maketh his petition to his God three times a day."

They soon saw that the king wished to save Daniel from the lions. Urgently they reminded him that the law of the Medes and Persians could never be changed; and at sunset he unwillingly gave the order that Daniel should be cast into the lions' den.

Full of fears for Daniel, the king passed a sleepless night; early in the morning he rose up and went to the door of the lions' den.

In a voice trembling with anxiety, he called out,

"O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God able to deliver thee from the lions?"

To his unbounded relief, Daniel's voice replied at once, "O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, and they have not hurt me, because in his sight and before thee, O king, I have done no wrong."

Quickly the king ordered men to release Daniel from the lions' den, and all were astonished that no harm had come to him.

"Blessed be the God of Daniel," said the king, "who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servant who trusted in him," and he wrote a letter, copies of which were sent all over the Persian Empire, saying, "I make a decree that all men in my dominion shall fear the God of Daniel; for he is the living God who works signs and wonders on the earth, and has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."

The Return from Captivity

News, splendid news! The Jews are to go back to Jerusalem! The captives are free at last! Cyrus, king of Persia, has made a proclamation that they are to go and rebuild their Temple. What a wonderful answer to the prayers which the poor captives have been pouring out before God for fifty years—for no one but God could have put the good thought in the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia.

Strange to say, some of the Jews had made themselves such comfortable homes in Babylon, that they did not want the trouble of the long march to Jerusalem, and the weary work of rebuilding their houses. But there were 42,000 who had never ceased to long for their own country, and were eager to start forth, led by Zerubbabel—a fitting leader, since he was descended from the family of king David.

Singing for joy, the huge company left Babylon, with their horses and mules, their camels and asses, laden with gold and silver, the gift of those who remained behind, for the building of the Temple.

On their arrival at the sad ruins of Jerusalem, the first thing to do was to put up an altar, so that sacrifices could be offered to God there.

Two years later the foundation stone of the new Temple was laid. There was a great crowd at the

ceremony; musicians played on trumpets and cymbals; priests in their gorgeous robes chanted, "O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good." "For his mercy endureth for ever," sang the choir; and all the people shouted, "Amen! Praise the Lord!"

Among the throng were some old men who could remember the Temple which King Solomon had built, and their hearts were so sad at the thought of all the beauty which had been destroyed, that they could not sing. Their weeping, mingled with the shouts of joy, could be heard far away; and the news soon spread among the strangers living around Jerusalem that the Jews were rebuilding their Temple.

A little party of these strangers from Samaria approached Zerubbabel. "Let us build with you," they said; "we also seek your God, but we have offered him no sacrifice since the king of Assyria brought us to this land."

"You have nothing to do with us," replied Zerubbabel and the leading Jews; "by ourselves we will build a house for the God of Israel, as Cyrus king of Persia has commanded us."

The Samaritans, annoyed by this refusal, did all they could to hinder the building, so that the Jews stopped working on the Temple, and began instead to build houses for themselves.

The prophet Haggai was sorry to see the people neglect the building of God's house, and he went about among them saying: "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in houses of cedar wood, while this house lieth waste? Be strong, O Zerubbabel, be strong, all

ye people of the land, and work, for I am with you, saith the Lord!"

Thus encouraged, the people set to work again, and seventy years from the day when the old Temple was destroyed, the new Temple was completed.

It was not as rich and gorgeous as Solomon's Temple; the people had not money enough to provide gold and silver such as David had collected. There was no golden ark in the most Holy Place, it had been lost for many years; but there was a curtain dividing off a Holy Place into which only the priests might go, to burn incense upon the golden altar there, while the prayers of the people rose to heaven like the sweet-smelling smoke. King Cyrus had given back the treasures which King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the first Temple, and these added beauty to God's house.

The prophet Haggai knew that the people had done their best. "Thus saith the Lord!" he proclaimed; "I will fill this house with glory; the latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former; and in this place will I give peace."

Then the priests and all the people kept the Feast of the Passover for seven days, and rejoiced in their God and his holy Temple.

Jerusalem Rebuilt

“ Why do you look so sad, seeing you are not ill?” asked the king of Persia, as he watched Nehemiah, his Jewish cup-bearer, pouring out his wine. “ It can be nothing else but sorrow of heart.”

Nehemiah, afraid lest it were wrong to show sadness in the king’s presence, prayed silently that he might answer rightly. “ O king, live for ever,” he replied; “ why should I not be sad when Jerusalem, the city of my fathers, lies waste. My brethren there are in great poverty; they have rebuilt the Temple, but they are surrounded by enemies, and they cannot repair the walls and the gates.”

“ For what do you make request?” asked the king; and Nehemiah, seeing kindness in the faces of the king and queen, ventured to speak the words which God put into his heart. “ May it please the king to send me to the city of my fathers, that I may build it; and may a letter be given me for the keeper of the king’s forest, that he may send timber to make beams for the houses, and gates, and wall of the city.”

The king graciously agreed to all that his servant asked, and sent him off on horseback, with a guard of captains and horsemen.

On his arrival at Jerusalem, Nehemiah did not at first make his plans known. He went out at midnight, and rode his horse all round the city, to inspect the

ruined walls in the clear, cold moonlight, so that he should know exactly which part could be repaired, and which must be entirely rebuilt.

The next morning he called the leading Jews together, and told them how God had sent him to build up Jerusalem. "Let us rise up and build!" they cried.

Soon the great task was started. Each man was given his own piece of work to do. Some built the walls, some put up beams for the gates, some prepared bolts and bars, some were labourers, carrying heavy burdens of wood and stone.

When the people of Samaria heard that the Jews were busy on their walls, they began to laugh. "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves with stones from the heaps of rubbish? Why, a jackal can break down their stone wall!" and they prepared an army to attack Jerusalem.

The faint-hearted Jews were afraid when they saw the Samaritan army approaching, until Nehemiah went among them saying: "Be not ye afraid of them! Remember the greatness of the Lord, and fight for your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses."

The Samaritans, encamped round the city, were surprised to find that from sunrise till the stars appeared in the evening, every builder worked with his sword at his side, and everyone who carried a burden carried also a spear or a shield. Thus, ready for battle at any moment that the trumpet should call them, they went steadily on with the work, until in fifty-two



"HAIL, MARY!"

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days the wall was finished, and Jerusalem was safe inside its great barred gates.

In a large open space between the Temple and the water gate, Nehemiah gathered together all the people who lived in the city, to hear the law of Moses.

Ezra the Scribe had preserved the precious book during the captivity in Babylon, and had brought it safely back to Jerusalem. He stepped up into a high wooden pulpit which had been erected there, and when the people saw the great volume in his hand, they all stood up.

With a loud voice Ezra blessed the God of Israel; the people raised their hands to heaven and shouted, "Amen, Amen!" then they bowed their heads and worshipped God with their faces to the ground.

Ezra the Scribe then opened the book and began to read the ancient laws, which had not been heard for so many years that the people had forgotten them; while the Levites stood by to explain them and make the meaning clear.

Many wept when they heard the once familiar words of God's commandments, and remembered how often they had broken them; but the Levites said: "Weep not, neither be grieved, for this day is holy unto the Lord." So for seven days they heard the book of the law, and kept holy-day with great rejoicing.

With their Temple, their city walls, and their holy book restored to them, had the Jews anything more to wish for?

Yes, the prophets had foretold a deliverer, who would come to save them from the power of their enemies.

Would he come soon, this king, chosen and anointed by God, this Messiah, as they loved to call him?

What would he be like? Would he be a prophet greater than all other prophets? Would he be a king, like their beloved warrior, David, or was Isaiah right in calling him the Prince of Peace? Would God himself come down from heaven to dwell among them?

Years went by, and these questions remained unanswered—the kingly deliverer did not come.

Yet slowly and surely, as God always works, he was getting the world ready for the coming of its Saviour. The Greeks rose to greater power than the Persians, and it was in their beautiful language that God's messengers would tell their news in many lands. Then the Romans became more mighty still, and it was on the splendid roads which they made that God's messengers would travel from city to city.

The Jews, while they submitted unwillingly to their Roman masters, were still looking for one more prophet, like a second Elijah, who would herald the approach of the king; still hoping and praying and patiently waiting for the coming of the Messiah.

The Prophet of the Most High

Zacharias, the old priest, entered alone into the Holy Place of the Temple, to burn incense on the golden altar. As the fragrant smoke filled the Temple, earnest prayers went up to God from the priests and people assembled in the Temple courts, for the coming of the long-expected Messiah.

His own disappointment at having no son to carry on his priestly work was forgotten as the aged man performed his holy and solemn task; his heart was full of the growing feeling of excitement and hope that the time foretold by the prophets was drawing near. But no prophet's voice had been heard for more than four hundred years—where was that last great prophet who would proclaim in the wilderness the coming of the king?

Suddenly the priest was troubled to see that he was not alone in the Holy Place—an angel of God was standing at the right side of the altar. "Fear not," said the angel. "Your prayers have been heard. You and your wife Elisabeth shall have a son, and you shall call his name John. He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his birth. He shall go before the children of Israel as Elijah the prophet, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

What astonishing words—quite overwhelming to Zacharias! He is to have a son in his old age, and his

son is to be the prophet of the Lord! It cannot be true!

"How shall this be?" he asked the angel, "for my wife and I are now old people."

"I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and I am sent to bring this good news," replied the angel. "Behold, you shall be dumb and not able to speak until these things come to pass, because you have not believed my words."

The angel disappeared, and the old priest went out from the Holy Place to bless the waiting people. They wondered that he had been so long, and when he held up his hand, but could speak no word, they rightly believed that he had seen a vision.

When his seven days of ministration in the Temple were ended, Zacharias returned over the hills to his home and his wife Elisabeth; his thoughts full of the wonderful goodness of God towards him.

In the village of Nazareth, among the hills of Galilee, lived Elisabeth's young cousin Mary. She was gentle and good, and spent much time in prayer for the coming of the Messiah.

One day when she was quiet and alone, the angel Gabriel appeared to her. "Hail, Mary, the Lord is with thee!" was his greeting.

Mary was troubled at the sight of this splendid messenger, but his next words reassured her. "Fear not, Mary," he said, "for thou hast found favour with God. Behold, thou shalt have a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God

shall give unto him the throne of David, and of his kingdom there shall be no end. And behold, Elisabeth thy kinswoman shall have a son in her old age—for with God all things are possible."

Filled with wonder and awe, Mary began to understand how greatly she was honoured. She, out of all the world, had been chosen by God to be the mother of the Messiah!

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord," she said humbly, "be it unto me according to thy word."

A few days later Mary went over the hill country to the city where Zacharias and Elisabeth lived. She must rejoice with her cousin, and tell her own wonderful news.

As soon as Elisabeth heard Mary's happy voice, and saw her radiant face, she knew that some great new joy had come to her. "Blessed art thou among women!" she exclaimed. "My soul doth magnify the Lord!" replied Mary, "and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour; for he hath looked upon the low estate of his handmaiden, and behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed!"

And the cousins spent three months together, talking of the happiness which would come to each of them when their promised sons were born.

Soon after Mary's departure, the glad news spread among Elisabeth's neighbours that she had a baby boy; and they came to the house when the child was eight days old, full of friendly interest.

"You must call him Zacharias, after his father," they said.

"Not so," answered his mother; "he shall be called John."

"But there is none of thy kindred called by this name," argued the neighbours; so Zacharias was appealed to.

The old man was still unable to speak, so he took his waxen writing tablet, and to the surprise of the company he wrote, "His name is John."

At that moment the power of speech came back to him. He began to praise God; and looking at his infant son, he said: "Thou, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord, to make ready his ways."

The neighbours went away to spread the news of all that they had seen and heard, and set all Judea wondering what kind of child this could be.

Zacharias and Elisabeth watched their son grow into a quiet and thoughtful lad. They let his hair grow long, as a sign that his life was given to God, just as the parents of Samson had done so long ago.

John learnt all that Zacharias could tell him of the coming Messiah, and he spent long days wandering in lonely desert places, thinking deeply of all that the prophets had foretold, until he knew that he, himself, had a message from God for the people. He must tell them that the king was at hand—they must cast aside all their sinful ways, and be ready, with clean hearts, to receive him.

The Birth of Jesus

Down the Roman road towards Jerusalem tramped Joseph, the carpenter, leading a donkey on which rode Mary, his wife.

The three days' journey was nearly over; before night they would reach Bethlehem, the birthplace of King David, where all who were descended from the royal family must go to be enrolled, by order of the Roman Emperor.

There were many travellers on the roads, all bound for the old home of their tribe; and the streets of Bethlehem were thronged with all those who claimed descent from the family of David.

Joseph went straight to the inn when they arrived at Bethlehem; he was anxious to find a comfortable resting place for Mary, his young wife, who was still awaiting the birth of her promised Son.

They found the inn courtyard crowded with camels and donkeys, all tied up in the centre, and every little room occupied by noisy travellers settling themselves in their blankets for the night.

"No room," said the landlord; but at Joseph's urgent entreaty that he would find some quiet place where they might rest, he showed them a little cave, which he used as a stable for his cattle, saying that they might spend the night there.

Joseph thankfully accepted the landlord's offer;

at least they would be quiet and alone, and more peaceful than among the chattering throng around the inn courtyard.

By the light of a lantern Joseph tied up his donkey, and made as soft a bed as he could for Mary, with their striped blankets spread upon the straw. But they had little sleep that night, for soon after midnight, while all Bethlehem lay silent under the starlit sky, Mary's infant Son was born.

Gently she wrapped him in long strips of white linen, the swaddling bands which all Jewish babies wear—but she had no cradle—where could she lay him to sleep? In the humble stable was a wooden manger filled with hay for the beasts to eat. This would make a soft, sweet-scented bed, and there Mary laid her new-born Baby.

Who could guess that this little Child, coming so quietly and humbly into the world, was the Son of God himself?

The angels knew, and the sky grew bright with the glory of heaven as they came to proclaim the birth of Jesus. But no one saw their splendour, no one heard their songs of praise, except a few poor shepherds keeping watch by their sheep on the hills of Bethlehem. As they lay round their fire, wrapped in their heavy coats, with the pale forms of their flock lying near them, they were startled to see a shining angel.

“Fear not,” said the angel, “for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For there is born to you to-day, in the city

of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be the sign unto you—you shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.”

As the shepherds listened in amazement to these wondrous words, the light of heaven shone round them, and the sky was filled with angels singing, “Glory to God in the highest—on earth peace, and good will towards men.”

The angels flew back to heaven, the glory faded, and the shepherds said one to another: “Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they left their sheep on the hillside, and went into the sleeping city in the early dawn.

They found the little stable; and creeping quietly to the doorway, they peeped in. By the dim lantern light they could see a cow and the donkey standing there, they could see Joseph anxiously watching over the young mother, and in the midst was the lovely sight they had come to see—the new-born Baby, sleeping on his bed of hay.

Silently they looked; then, full of a strange and heavenly joy, they went away praising God, to tell of all that they had heard and seen on this first Christmas morning.

Wise Men from the East

Unnoticed by the people passing up and down the streets of Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary made their way to the Temple, and entered one of the big gates. Joseph carried a small cage containing two pigeons, and his wife held her six weeks' old Baby in her arms.

They had come to present the infant Jesus to God in the temple, and to offer their gift of two young pigeons, as the law of Moses commanded.

An old man approached them as they walked across the wide court—a good old man, often to be seen in the Temple, watching and praying for the coming of the Messiah; and well-known in Jerusalem for his amazing belief that God would not let him die until he had seen the answer to his prayer.

Joseph and Mary did not know old Simeon, but they stopped and let him take the Baby into his arms. As he looked at the infant face, he knew that the great wish of his life had come true; here at last was the promised King, and looking up to heaven, he said, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

Some months later all Jerusalem was troubled by the arrival of three splendidly dressed strangers on camels, attended by servants, and asking: “Where is he that is born King of the Jews, for we have

seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him?"

Herod the Great, who lived in Jerusalem, was king of Judea only so long as he was obedient to the Roman Emperor. He was angry and afraid when he heard of the arrival of these strangers from the East. Were they seeking some king who would take from him even the little power that he had?

Hastily he summoned the chief priests and the scribes, and they replied to his questions that Bethlehem was expected to be the birthplace of the promised King.

The three Wise Men from the East were brought into Herod's presence, and questioned closely about the star which they had seen. They were learned old men, who had spent long years studying the skies, and they knew from their ancient books that the appearance of this bright new star proclaimed the birth of a King of the Jews.

"Go to Bethlehem, and search carefully for the child," said Herod, "and when you have found him, bring me word, that I also may come and worship him."

Never dreaming that Herod's intention was not to worship, but to kill the holy Child, the Wise Men went on their way. When the little white town of Bethlehem came into view that evening, they rejoiced to see, twinkling above it, the bright star which they had followed from their home in the East.

But where had it led them? Here was no royal palace—could a king be found in such a humble home? Carrying costly gifts, the Wise Men entered

the little house. The star had not misled them, the King was here!

Reverently kneeling before the little Child, who watched them from his mother's arms, one old man offered his golden crown, a fitting gift for a king. The second Wise Man, bending low, presented a casket of precious incense; and the third a jar of costly myrrh.

After bowing to the ground in worship before the holy Baby, the three great men quietly departed, leaving Mary full of wonder that first the humble shepherds, then old Simeon in the Temple, and now these splendid strangers, who were not Jews, but Gentiles from a far country, should recognize in her little Baby the long-expected Messiah.

Impatiently Herod awaited the return of the Wise Men to Jerusalem. They did not come, for God had warned them in a dream to go back to their home another way. In a rage, Herod gave the cruel order that every boy in Bethlehem, under two years old, should be killed—he would not have a rival king in his land!

That night God spoke to Joseph in a dream, and said, “Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I tell thee; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.”

There was no time to lose—before daylight Joseph was leading his donkey, upon which rode Mary, with her Baby clasped within her cloak, out of Bethlehem, and southwards to safety in the great land of Egypt.



SIMEON AND THE BABY JESUS

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The Holy Child Jesus

When a little Jewish boy was five years old he began to go to school. The village priest was the schoolmaster, and his class sat on the floor around him in the little church, or synagogue, as it was called.

The rabbi told his eager listeners the thrilling stories of the heroes of their land, of Joshua, Gideon, Samson, and many others; he taught them the history of their nation, and of their great kings, Saul, and David, and Solomon; he showed them how God had spoken to their forefathers through the prophets; and he instructed them in the law of Moses.

The boys learned the psalms of David, which were sung each Sabbath day at the synagogue services, besides writing with pointed pens on waxen tablets, and reading in Hebrew and Greek.

Among the boys who went daily to learn from the rabbi at Nazareth was Jesus. Joseph had brought his family back from Egypt after the death of King Herod, and they lived happily in the country village among the hills of Galilee; Joseph working in his carpenter's shop, Mary busy in her little home, bringing up her holy Child with loving care, teaching him all she could of his Heavenly Father, helping him to pray, and watching him grow into a healthy, intelligent boy.

A pretty little village was Nazareth in the days when Jesus lived there and had friends in every

house; how well he must have known its narrow, crooked street, and the one well where the women went to draw their water; the fields around where farmers were ploughing, sowing, or reaping in due season; and, farther off, the hills of Galilee from which could be seen Mount Carmel and the distant sea.

We may be sure that Jesus loved those hills, gay with wild flowers of every colour, anemones, poppies, lupins, and the lovely lilies, which seemed to him more splendid than King Solomon in all his glory.

So the happy years went by until Jesus was twelve years old, and a time came for which he had eagerly waited; he was to go to Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph and his Nazareth neighbours, to keep the Feast of the Passover there.

The journey itself was a pleasure in the bright spring weather, the party from Nazareth joining with groups from other villages, the procession growing longer at each cross road.

“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go unto the house of the Lord,” sang the crowd, when, at a turn in the road, the great walled city came into sight. “As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people,” they chanted; and Jesus knew the songs, for he had learnt them at school from his book of Psalms.

The services in the crowded Temple, with their music, and incense, and splendidly robed priests, were wonderful; and afterwards the people could wander around and admire God’s beautiful House, or talk to the rabbis who sat in the porches.

These wise priests must know far more than the old rabbi at Nazareth, and Jesus approached them, anxious to ask them many things, and willing to hear all that they would tell him about God.

The Passover Feast days slipped quickly by, the pilgrims packed up and started for home; Mary and Joseph, believing that Jesus was among the Nazareth party, went a day's journey, and only discovered at night-time that he was not with the company.

They questioned their friends; no one had seen Jesus that day—no one knew where he was. Hastily they retraced their steps all the way back to Jerusalem. After seeking in vain in the city, the anxious parents reached the Temple, and there they saw Jesus, sitting among a little group of rabbis, listening to them and answering their questions. The old men seemed amazed at the boy's knowledge; and he had plainly forgotten all else but his eager interest in their teaching.

"My Son," cried Mary, "why hast thou thus dealt with us? Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing!"

"How is it that you sought me?" asked Jesus in surprise; "did you not know that I should be in my Father's House?"

Obediently Jesus left those clever rabbis, and went home with Mary and Joseph. There he settled down again to the quiet village life, helping his mother, working with Joseph, growing from childhood to manhood, beloved by all who knew him.

The Voice in the Wilderness

On the banks of the river Jordan, surrounded by a crowd of men and women, stood a young man, his limbs tanned by sun and wind, and his face full of earnest purpose, for he had a message to all who would listen.

This was John, the son of Zacharias and Elisabeth. Very like a young Elijah he looked, in his rough garment of camel's hair and leather belt, as he stood there proclaiming, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

From the towns and villages of Judea, and from Galilee, came rich and poor, fishermen, tax collectors, Roman soldiers, and even Pharisees from Jerusalem to hear this new preacher.

"Who is he?" they asked one another. "Can he be the Christ, the promised Messiah, or is he the prophet Elijah?"

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Make ye ready the way of the Lord," explained John.

This then was the prophet of the Most High—the Messiah himself must be very near!

One by one those who were sorry for their past sins went up to John, confessing that they were not fit to meet the Messiah. One by one John took them down to the river and dipped them in it, as a sign that their sins were washed away.



“MAKE YE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD”

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"I baptize you with water," said John, "but there is one coming after me who is mightier than I, and he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

One day, among the crowd round the Baptist, was the carpenter of Nazareth.

"I have need to be baptized by thee, and dost thou come to me?" said John, when he recognized his cousin Jesus.

Yes, Jesus wished to be baptized. It is true that the Son of God had no sin to confess—his baptism would but mark a change in his life; he had laid aside his carpenter's tools, for he had other work to do.

After the baptism, as Jesus stepped out of the water, a sudden beam of light shone from the sky, and the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, came down and rested upon him. At the same time he heard a voice saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

The long years of waiting were over, the Messiah had come; but how would the Jews receive him? Would they know him, and follow him?

That same day Jesus went away among the lonely hills and rocks of the wilderness, and there spent long days and nights, heedless of burning sun, or hunger, or howling wolves, lost in deep thought and prayer.

He knew that the Jews, through whom God had planned to bless all mankind, had been weak and sinful, and made the beautiful world an unhappy place; now he had come himself to tell them that God loved them still, and to show them the way to the Kingdom of Heaven.

How should he do this? Should he with his divine power turn the stones of the wilderness into bread to feed the poor? Should he win the admiration of the people by throwing himself down from a great height, perhaps a pinnacle of the Temple, and call upon the angels to save him from harm? Should he proclaim himself the king of all the nations?

No one knows how hard it was for Jesus to put aside these tempting ideas. But he knew that bread for the bodies would not lead the souls of men to God. He knew that one daring deed would not show them the way to Heaven, and that the kingdom which he had come to proclaim was not an earthly kingdom.

At last he made his great decision to live among men, to teach, and heal, and love; to show them how to live, and, if need be, how to die, and so turn the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of Heaven.

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After forty days Jesus appeared again among the crowds round the Baptist.

“Behold the Lamb of God,” said John, and a little group of fishermen from the lake of Galilee watched him, and followed him at a short distance, longing to speak to him.

They soon had their chance, for Jesus turned and saw them. They made friends at once; and the next day when Jesus started off to return to Galilee, he was accompanied by the four fishermen, Peter and his brother Andrew, James and his brother John; all eager to follow their new Master.

The Wedding at Cana

In a little house in Cana of Galilee there was bustle and excitement, for a wedding feast was nearly ready.

The table was laid, and the cushioned seats were arranged round it; the best food and wine that the bridegroom could afford were prepared; servants waited by the door to wash the dust from the guests' feet in water from six big stone pitchers, and the ruler of the feast, or steward, saw that everything was in order.

The bridegroom led in his white-veiled bride, and the happy guests crowded into their places at the table. Among them were Jesus, and Mary, his mother, from Nazareth; Peter, Andrew, James, and John, the four fishermen from the lake of Galilee; also Philip and Nathaniel, who were new friends of Jesus.

The servants moved round the room handing dishes, and filling up the cups with more wine as soon as they were empty, and all went merrily until Jesus' mother noticed the servants speaking quietly to the bridegroom with troubled faces.

She soon learned that there was no more wine.

She knew that if the guests discovered this, it would bring shame on the bridegroom, and spoil the wedding party; something must be done at once—she would tell Jesus.

"They have no more wine," she whispered; and to the worried servants she said, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

During those forty days in the wilderness Jesus had decided not to use his divine power to make his own work easier; but this was different—he would help his humble friends out of their difficulty. It was always his pleasure to make people happy.

He turned to the servants who stood by, waiting for orders. "Fill the water pots with water," he said.

At once they took the great stone pitchers which stood empty by the door, and filled them to the brim with water, though they knew that water in that country was not pure enough to drink.

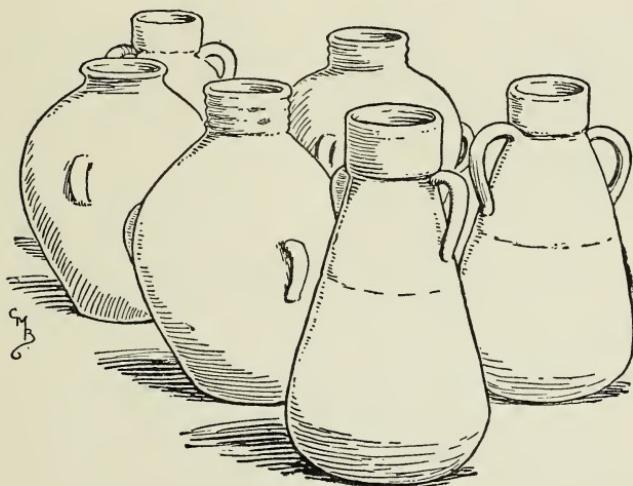
"Draw out some of the water now, and take it to the steward," commanded Jesus. Surprised, but still obedient, the servants did so.

How much greater was their surprise when they saw that the water which they poured into the steward's cup became rich, red wine!

The steward, who had not noticed the shortage of wine, raised his cup to his lips, then looked across the table at the bridegroom. "Most men," he said, "when they give a feast, bring out first their good wine, and afterwards, when men have drunk well, that which is worse. But you have kept your best wine until now!"

Neither the bridegroom, the steward, nor the guests knew where this delicious wine had come from—only the servants who had drawn the water knew—but afterwards the whole story was made known.

People marvelled at the wonderful power which Jesus had, and the fame of this first miracle spread throughout Galilee. As yet no one knew that Jesus was the Son of God, and in changing water into wine at the wedding feast he was using the same divine power which governs the whole of nature, and every year performs the miracle of seedtime and harvest to provide food for mankind.



A Nobleman's Son

A nobleman, one of King Herod's officers, lived with his wife and little boy in a big house at Capernaum, overlooking the blue water of the lake of Galilee.

He was a wealthy man, with servants to wait upon him, and every possible comfort in his home; but when his only son became ill with a fever, his money was of little use, for doctors were unskilled in those days, and few medicines were known.

The anxious mother watched over the poor little boy, and did all she could for him; but he grew weaker—he could not live much longer—he was worn out by the burning fever.

Was there no one who could save him?

Yes, there was one, Jesus of Nazareth, who had proved that he possessed some power greater than other men, for had he not turned water into wine at a wedding feast?

It was said that he was actually on his way to Capernaum—that he had already reached Cana, which was only a few miles away.

Impatiently the nobleman waited, until he could wait no longer—he would ride to Cana himself, he would find Jesus of Nazareth, and ask him to come at once—or it would be too late.

Had that country road to Cana ever been ridden more quickly? A few hurried inquiries in the village

Showed him where Jesus was staying, and the nobleman was soon entreating him to come without delay to Capernaum to heal his only son, who was at the point of death.

Jesus looked kindly at the worried father. "Unless you see me do signs and wonders you will not believe in me," he said.

"Lord, come down, before my child dies," pleaded the nobleman.

Jesus took pity on him then. "Go thy way, thy son liveth," he said, and the father believed that this was true; no one could look into Jesus' face and doubt his word.

With a lighter heart he rode back through the night to Capernaum, but before he reached home he saw his servants coming to meet him.

What news did they bring? Was it good or bad?

Good news indeed! The child was better, the fever had gone.

"At what time did the fever leave him?" inquired the nobleman.

"Yesterday at the seventh hour," was the reply. Yes, that was the very time when Jesus had said those comforting words, "Thy son liveth."

Would the nobleman and his wife ever forget that happy day when Jesus had given them back their little son in such a wonderful way? They, and their whole household, became his firm friends, and were among the first to welcome him when he came to Capernaum.

A Morning by the Lake of Galilee

What can all those people be doing on the shore of the lake of Galilee? Men, women, and children are there, all so quiet, and all looking towards the sparkling blue sea.

Are they waiting for the fishing boats to come in? No, Peter and John came home some time ago, looking tired and disappointed, because they had been out with the nets all night and caught no fish.

There was a gentle sound of water lapping round the sides of one of the fishing boats which had been pushed out a yard or two from the shore; and from the boat a man's voice rang out loudly and clearly—it was Jesus' voice.

That is why the silent crowd were looking and listening so intently. Jesus had not been long in Capernaum before they learnt that his stories about the Kingdom of Heaven were the best they had ever heard, and they did not want to miss a single word.

These people would have stayed and listened just as long as Jesus was willing to speak; but presently he stopped, and turned to Peter, who was with him in the boat.

“Peter,” he said, “row the boat out into the deep water, and let down your nets.”

Andrew, Peter's brother, was also in the boat. The two fishermen looked at one another and shook their heads, thinking perhaps that Jesus did not understand fishing, and did not know that fish are not usually caught on a sunny morning.

"It's no use, Master," replied Peter, "we have been out all night and caught nothing, so it is not likely we shall get any fish now. But if you wish," he added, "we will let down the nets."

The two men took up their oars and rowed out into the middle of the lake. With Jesus watching them, they put out the nets over the side of the boat.

To their amazement, in a very short time they could feel that the nets were full of fish. They tried to draw them along towards the shore, but they were so heavy that they began to break.

They did not want to lose any of these fine fish, so they shouted to their friends James and John, who were mending their nets on the shore, to come and help.

James and John jumped into their father's boat and rowed out quickly; soon the four fishermen were busy pulling up the heavy nets, and lifting the great big fish into the boats.

Peter had been a fisherman for many years, and James and John had heard their old father Zebedee speak of big shoals of fish in the lake, but none of them had ever seen anything like this. Soon the boats were both so heavy with fish that they began to sink.

Very carefully, however, the men got their boats and their precious load safely to land; and then the

wonder of it all came upon Peter. He could think of no words with which to thank Jesus; he just flung himself on the sand at Jesus' feet, saying, "O Lord, I am only a sinful man—I am not fit to be your friend!"

Jesus understood how Peter was feeling, and looking very kindly at him, said: "Do not be afraid, Peter; you shall help me in a greater work than catching fish in a net. You shall learn to bring men and women into the Kingdom of Heaven."

What splendid work! The four fishermen were glad to leave their homes, friends, everything, for the joy of helping the Master with such work as this. So they became Jesus' first disciples, and followed him wherever he went, learning to be "fishers of men". Through the cities and villages of Galilee and Judea they went with Jesus; they heard him preaching the good tidings of the Kingdom of Heaven; they watched him cure all kinds of illness by the touch of his hand; they saw him surrounded by admiring crowds, and noticed that when he was tired he would withdraw from the people and spend whole nights in prayer to God.

Truly a wonderful new life began for them on that morning by the lake of Galilee.

In All His Works Most Wonderful

It was evening at Capernaum. The sun was setting behind the hills, the lake of Galilee was calm and beautiful in the glowing pink light.

"Let us take the boat, and sail across to the other side of the lake," said Jesus to his fisherman friends.

All the long hot day Jesus had been on the sea-shore, surrounded by crowds of people, talking to them, and telling them his wonderful stories. The fishermen knew that he was tired, so they gladly launched the boat and put up the sails; soon they were gliding over the smooth water, Jesus resting in the stern, with his head on a pillow.

What a quiet, peaceful evening it was; only just enough breeze to move the boat along. The fishermen, holding the ropes lightly in their hands, watched Jesus, and were pleased to see that he soon fell asleep.

Then they looked again at the sky. The sun had disappeared, and dark threatening clouds were rising behind the hills. The wind blew more strongly; waves began to beat against the sides of the boat.

How the wind blew! The water was dashing over the boat—they must bale it out, or the boat would sink! How black the sky looked! This was the worst storm they had ever known!

And Jesus? He still lay fast asleep.

"Master, carest thou not that we perish!" cried the terrified fishermen.

At the sound of their voices, Jesus awoke.

"Why are you so frightened?" he asked them.
"Where is your faith?"

Then, heedless of the raging wind and sea, he stood up in the boat: "Peace!" he said. "Be still!"

At once, as though they had heard his voice, the wind died down and the clouds rolled away—there was a great calm.

The fishermen, ashamed now of their fears, were marvelling at this new wonder. "Who can he be," they whispered to one another, "that even the winds and waves obey him?"

When the boat returned to Capernaum the next day, there was a great crowd of people waiting on the shore. What a joyful welcome they gave Jesus!

A man pushed to the front of the crowd; there was no smile of greeting on his face, it was plain that he was in great trouble. He flung himself at Jesus' feet. "Master!" he cried, "my little daughter is at the point of death—I pray thee, come and lay thy hand on her, that she may live."

Jesus knew the man; it was Jairus, a ruler of the little Capernaum Synagogue, where he sometimes preached the sermon on the Sabbath day. Jesus knew the little girl too, she was twelve years old; he was friends with all the children of Capernaum. Yes, he would come.

The crowd made a way for them to pass, and to-

gether Jesus and the father, followed by Peter, James, and John, hastened up the road, past the fishermen's houses, past the little office where Matthew sat collecting taxes for the Roman Government. But before they reached Jairus' house they were met by one of his servants. "Thy daughter is dead," said the man; "do not trouble the Master to come any farther."

Jesus overheard the servant's words. "Fear not," he said to Jairus, "only believe, and she shall be made well."

When they reached the house, they found it full of weeping friends, and paid mourners making dismal music on drums and flutes.

"Weep not," said Jesus, "the maid is not dead, but sleepeth," and they laughed scornfully, for they knew the child was dead. Jesus then ordered the lamenting people out of the house, and taking with him only Peter, James, and John, he followed Jairus and his wife to the bedroom.

There lay the little girl, so still upon her low bed. Jesus, who loved all children, took her gently by the hand. "Little maid, I say unto thee, arise."

At once the child's spirit came back to her, she opened her eyes, she got up from her bed, and she walked towards her mother.

"Give her something to eat," said Jesus, for the parents seemed dazed with astonishment; then he quietly left the house, followed by his disciples—those three fishermen who had been privileged to see yet one more of their Master's wonderful works.

The Hungry Multitude

As Jesus went about among the towns and villages of Galilee, teaching the people and healing the sick, a great number of men and women followed him. They called themselves his disciples, because they were learning from him.

One day Jesus chose twelve men out of this throng of disciples, and explained to them that they must now begin the new work for which he had called them. They were to go out into the villages, to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, and to heal the sick, as they had seen Jesus himself do. They should be called apostles, which is a name for those who are sent out.

Among the twelve were the four fishermen, Matthew the tax-gatherer, Philip, Nathaniel, Thomas, and Judas Iscariot.

Away they went, two and two, each with a staff in his hand, but taking neither bread nor money for his journey; they were to depend on the kindness of the village people for their food and lodging.

At an appointed time the apostles met again at Capernaum, eager to tell Jesus all that they had said and done.

“Come apart with me, into a quiet place, and rest a while,” said Jesus; so they launched a boat, and sailed across to the other side of the lake of Galilee.

How delightful it would be to spend a long happy day alone with Jesus, far from the crowds which always surrounded him in Capernaum.

They landed at a place where the grassy hill sloped to the shore, they climbed to the top, and threw themselves down among the wild flowers.

There was a lovely view. They could see across the blue water the little white houses of Capernaum, and the purple hills beyond. They could see the winding sandy road which led from village to village round the lake.

Who were all those men, women, and children, some walking, some running, hundreds of them, perhaps thousands, crowding along that sandy road?

It was soon plain to the twelve apostles who they were, and what they wanted—they had seen Jesus crossing the lake in the fishing boat, and they had run round by road to meet him there!

Jesus showed no disappointment that the crowds had spoilt his peaceful day. “Poor things,” he said to the twelve, “they do not know what they want; they are like sheep without a shepherd.”

He welcomed them kindly, and spent the whole day talking to them, and curing any who were sick.

Towards evening the apostles approached Jesus. “It is getting late,” they said; “send the people away, that they may buy themselves food in the villages.”

“There is no need for them to go away,” replied Jesus; “you must give them something to eat here.”

“Are we to go and buy food for them?” inquired

Philip; “two hundred pennyworth would not be enough for everyone to take a little.”

Andrew came up then. “Master,” he said, “there is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fishes—but what are they among so many?”

The lad came forward and offered his little loaves and fishes; he was willing to give them, but surely even Jesus could not make them enough to feed 5000 men, besides women and children!

Yes, Jesus took them in his hands; he gave thanks to God for them, then divided them among the twelve apostles; and they handed portions of bread and fish to each of the hungry people who sat round on the grass, until everyone was satisfied.

When the meal was over, there were still pieces of food left upon the grass. “Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be wasted,” said Jesus; and the people looked on in surprise while the apostles filled twelve baskets with broken pieces which were left over from the five barley loaves and the two small fishes.

“He is, of a truth, a prophet,” they said to one another; and they went away, wishing that they could make him their king.

When Jesus returned to Capernaum, he found the crowds there were even greater than before; they had come from the towns and villages round the lake, seeking for him.

“Truly, you seek me because you ate of the loaves and were filled,” he told them; “you should rather seek for the bread of God, which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”



JESUS ABOUT TO FEED THE MULTITUDE

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(See page 176)

"Lord, evermore give us this bread!" they cried.

"I am the Bread of Life," replied Jesus; "he that comes to me shall never hunger, and he that believes on me shall never thirst."

The people went away very puzzled; they could not understand these words. John the apostle heard them, and remembered them; later on he understood them, and wrote them down for us.



The Good Samaritan

The learned Scribes and Pharisees, who studied and taught the law of Moses and the books of the Prophets, were displeased when they heard of the multitudes who followed Jesus. Some of them journeyed to Capernaum, and mingled with the crowds to watch and listen to him.

They saw him joining in the pleasures of his friends, visiting both rich and poor, and helping those who were in trouble; they saw the children run to him and fearlessly take his hand; they noticed that he had a smile and a kindly greeting for all.

Jealousy began to creep into the hearts of these solemn old men. They always observed the laws of Moses, they gave a tenth of their money to the poor, they were careful to fast on the appointed days, they prayed aloud to God so that all might hear them; but yet, though men praised them for their goodness, no children clung affectionately to their robes, they were not followed by loving disciples.

So whenever the Pharisees heard Jesus teaching a crowd of people, they stood by with gloomy faces, trying to find fault with his words.

“I am not come to destroy the law of Moses, but to fill it with a new spirit,” said Jesus one day. “It has been said by them of old time, ‘Thou shalt not kill’, but I say unto you, that if you are angry without a cause you have broken the law. You have heard it

said, ‘ Love your neighbour and hate your enemy’, but I say unto you, love your enemies and pray for them that ill-treat you. And take care that you do not your good deeds so that men may see and praise you. When you fast, or pray, or give to the poor, do it secretly, and your Heavenly Father, who sees in secret, shall reward you.’”

The people listened with deep interest to this new teaching, which made so beautiful the stern laws of Moses; but the Pharisees shook their heads, and planned to test Jesus with hard questions.

It was a lawyer who stepped forward one day with a question which he believed would puzzle Jesus.

“ Master,” he began politely, “ what shall I do to win eternal life?”

“ What is written in the law?” asked Jesus.

“ Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself,” replied the lawyer promptly.

“ Thou hast answered right; this do and thou shalt live,” said Jesus. But the lawyer was not satisfied —Jesus must answer him more fully. “ And who is my neighbour?” he persisted.

Instead of giving a plain answer, Jesus began to tell a story of a man who travelled down the lonely road from Jerusalem to Jericho. It was a dangerous road, winding between desolate hills and rocky caves, in which robbers lay hidden. A band of these rough men sprang out upon the traveller; they beat him, seized his money and his clothes, and left him lying half dead by the roadside.

Presently, a priest returning from Jerusalem saw the wounded man lying there; he did not even stop to offer help, but passed by on the other side of the road.

Later, a Levite travelling that way looked at the man for a moment, then hurried away.

The next traveller was a man from Samaria with his laden donkey; a kind-hearted man, who hastened up full of pity. He saw at once that it was a Jew lying there, but he put aside all thoughts of the ill-feeling which had been between Jews and Samaritans for hundreds of years—ever since the Jews refused their help in rebuilding the Temple. If any man, either friend or stranger, were in trouble, he felt bound to help.

Quickly the Samaritan unpacked his bundle. He cleansed the man's wounds with wine, then poured on soothing oil, and bound them up with strips of linen. He then lifted the Jew on to his donkey, and they went along slowly until they reached a little inn.

"Take care of this man for me," said the Samaritan to the landlord; "here is money to pay for anything he needs. If you spend more, when I return I will repay you."

The story was ended, it had given the lawyer his answer. "Which of the three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among thieves?" asked Jesus.

"He who showed mercy on him," replied the lawyer.

"Go," said Jesus, "and do thou likewise."

The Prodigal Son

All Jews disliked paying money to the Roman Government; it reminded them that the Roman Emperor was their master. They also disliked the publicans, whose business it was to collect the money. These publicans were often dishonest men, and a respectable Jew would no sooner go into a publican's house than into the home of any man or woman who lived a wicked life.

How wonderful it was for these poor publicans and sinners when they found that Jesus did not despise them; when they understood that even they could enter the Kingdom of Heaven if they were sorry for their sins, and tried to live a good life. How eagerly they welcomed Jesus into their homes when they made feasts in his honour!

"Why does he eat with publicans and sinners?" murmured the Pharisees one to another.

"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," said Jesus, when he heard their words, "and I say unto you that there shall be joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance."

Then, to show more clearly how kind a Father God is, Jesus went on to tell the story of a man who had two sons. The younger son longed to leave home and see the world, so he asked for the portion of money

which would one day be his. The father divided his wealth, and the young man took his share. He went away to a far country, where he had a gay time and made many friends so long as his money lasted.

In time his money was all spent, his new friends turned from him, and he was left alone, penniless, in a foreign land.

He went miserably from place to place looking for work, and at last a farmer took him as a swine-herd. Food was scarce, for there had been a famine in the land, and as he sat minding the pigs, and thinking how foolish he had been, he was so hungry that he would have been glad to eat the pigs' food.

"Even the servants in my father's house have bread enough and to spare, while I am starving here," he thought bitterly.

Should he go home? Would his father forgive him, and let him in? Yes, he would go, and would say, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son—make me as one of thy hired servants."

All the time that his son had been away, the father had been waiting and watching for his return. Day after day he looked down the road, longing to see his boy again.

One day he saw a poor ragged youth coming slowly and wearily along—could that be his strong, active son, who had gone away so hopefully? Yes, his father knew him; he ran to meet him and welcome him home.

"Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before

thee, I am no more worthy to be called thy son," said the young man humbly; but his father only kissed him and hurried him indoors, then called to the servants: " Bring hither the best robe, and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Make ready a feast, let us eat and be merry, for this my son was lost, and is found!"

Presently the elder son came in from the fields where he had been at work, and was surprised to hear the sound of music and dancing. He questioned the servants, and when he heard that his brother had come home, he would not go in. Why should he rejoice over one who had left home and wasted his father's money!

" These many years I have worked for you, and obeyed you, and you never made me a feast so that I could make merry with my friends," he grumbled, when his father came out to him.

" My son," replied his father, " you are always with me, sharing all that I have. It is right to be glad now, for this thy brother has done wrong and is sorry for it—he was lost and is found."

All who listened were interested in this story. A few could see in it a heavenly meaning—they learnt from it that God was like that loving father, who freely forgave his sinful son—and the Pharisees knew that they were like the elder brother who would not welcome a repentant sinner.

Jesus and the Children

Day by day the twelve apostles listened to Jesus' teaching, and tried to understand. It was hard for them to believe that the kingdom of which he often spoke was a Heavenly Kingdom. They still wished to see him drive out the Romans, and take his place upon the throne of King David at Jerusalem.

"What shall we be in the new kingdom?" they asked one another; "we have left our homes to follow Jesus, surely we shall be well rewarded—but which of us will be the greatest?"

Some thought one, and some thought another, but they did not like to ask Jesus, who was walking a little apart from them along the road to Capernaum.

When they reached the town, and were resting after their long walk, Jesus asked the twelve, "What were you disputing on the way?"

They felt too ashamed to tell him; but he knew their thoughts. He called to a child who was playing near. The child ran up to him eagerly.

Then Jesus turned again to the twelve, and said: "If any would be great among you, let him be the servant of all. He that is least in this world shall be great in the Kingdom of Heaven. But I say unto you, that unless you humble yourselves, and trust me as this little child does, you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

The twelve looked at Jesus and the child in silence. How fond the Master was of children!

One morning after this, when Jesus was preaching by the river Jordan, with crowds pressing round to hear him, and the scribes questioning him, the apostles noticed a little group of women approaching.

Some were carrying babies, some leading small children by the hand, and all were trying to push their way through the crowd to get near Jesus.

"Let us through," they said. "We want Jesus to bless our babies."

"You must not trouble the Master now," said the apostles, "he is busy—take the children away."

But the mothers still pressed forward; they knew that Jesus loved babies, and would lay his hand in blessing on their little ones.

Again the apostles tried to turn them away, and Jesus heard the voices raised in argument; he saw at once what was happening. He came quickly through the crowd.

"Let the little children come to me," he said to the angry apostles; "forbid them not, for they belong to the Kingdom of Heaven."

Then, to the joy of the mothers, Jesus went among the little group, taking the babies in his arms, laying a kind hand on every small boy and girl, and giving each one his blessing.

Once more the apostles saw how much Jesus loved the children; we know that he loves them still, and wants their mothers to bring them all to his church to receive his blessing.

The Good Shepherd

Over the hills, and across the valleys of Galilee, the Jewish shepherds led their sheep to find streams of water and fresh grass. They could be heard from a distance calling to their flocks, and their sheep followed because they knew their own shepherd's voice.

Each sheep-fold on the hillside was surrounded by a rough stone wall, and had a narrow door at one end, through which the sheep entered one at a time in the evening. The shepherd stood by the door counting them, and when his hundred sheep were safely inside, he fastened the door; then he lit a fire outside, and lay beside it all night, wrapped in his thick coat, to watch lest a thief should try to climb into the fold, or a wolf come and kill one of his lambs.

It sometimes happened that one sheep was missing; it had strayed over the hills alone. Then the shepherd shut in his ninety-nine, and set off with his crook in his hand to find the lost one.

On he went, up and down the narrow winding paths, calling his sheep by name, until at last he heard its frightened bleating, and found it on some rocky crag, or at the bottom of a stony pit, or hurt so that it could not walk. Then he laid it across his shoulders, and tramped back with it to the fold, glad that he had found his sheep that was lost.

When Jesus was a boy in Galilee, he often watched

the shepherds leading their flocks home to the fold; and later, when he was teaching in the villages, he used to hear the shepherd's voices echoing across the hills.

He knew that poor ignorant men and women were very like sheep which had lost their way, and that he was their shepherd who had come to find them, and lead them to the fold—which was the Kingdom of Heaven.

“I am the Good Shepherd,” he said one day; “my sheep know my voice, and they will follow me. A hired shepherd will run away when he sees a wolf coming; he does not love the sheep, because they are not his own. The Good Shepherd will give his life to save his sheep.”

The apostles did not fully understand these words; they did not know how soon their Good Shepherd would die for his sheep. Jesus knew that the priests and Pharisees were growing more and more jealous of him; he knew that they would presently wish to take his life; and he tried gently to warn his apostles that danger awaited him when they went up to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover.

“Is it not written in the books of the prophets that the Messiah shall suffer and die for his people?” he asked them. “Truly he shall be shamefully treated, and shall die—but on the third day he shall rise again.”

Still the apostles did not believe that any harm could come to their beloved Master; and they went with him along the road to Jerusalem, little dreaming that soon they themselves would be scattered like frightened sheep, while enemies surrounded their Good Shepherd.

Jesus at Jericho

The road along which Jesus and his twelve apostles journeyed to Jerusalem lay through the walled city of Jericho. At the time of the Passover many travellers passed that way, and some stopped to drop a coin into the outstretched hand of the blind beggar who sat by the city gate.

All day long blind Bartimæus listened to the footsteps going to and fro; he heard the slow tread of camels, the quick trot of donkeys, and the voices of men and women.

One day he noticed an unusual stir at the gate; footsteps hurried in and out, voices were raised in excitement. "What does it all mean?" he asked; and a friend told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."

Jesus of Nazareth! Why, this was the great Teacher who had done so many good works among the sick and the poor! The blind man was suddenly full of hope. He must not miss this wonderful chance.

"Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" he called loudly.

Some men tried to stop him, but he only cried out the more, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus heard him, and stood still. "Bring him to me," he said.

Several men ran up to the beggar. "Be of good

cheer, Bartimæus," they said, "the Master is calling for you."

Bartimæus sprang to his feet, threw off his old coat, and eagerly grasped the arm of a man who led him into the middle of the road, where Jesus stood waiting.

Then he heard Jesus' voice saying, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?"

"Master, that I may see!" cried the blind man.

"Receive thy sight, thy faith hath saved thee," said Jesus.

Immediately the blind man's eyes were opened—he could see the face of Jesus, and all the people thronging the sunny road.

The crowd began to praise God as they moved on through the gate of Jericho; and among them went Bartimæus, joyfully following Jesus.

The news had already reached Jericho that Jesus would pass through the city, and the street was full of people, all pushing one another in their anxiety to get a glimpse of the great Teacher.

Jesus walked slowly along, noticing the crowds on the flat roofs, and at the windows. Presently he stopped and looked up at a sycamore tree which grew by the roadside.

There, peering down among the branches, was a man, well known in Jericho, for he was Zacchæus, the chief tax-collector. He was a short man, and as no one had cared to make way for him to see Jesus go by, he had climbed up the tree to be sure of a good view.

He had not dreamed that Jesus would notice him

there, and his surprise was still greater when he heard Jesus say to him, "Make haste and come down, Zacchæus, for to-day I am staying at your house."

With all speed Zacchæus scrambled down the sycamore tree, and hastened home to order a feast in Jesus' honour, and to be there to greet him when he arrived.

This was a great day for Zacchæus, the greatest day of his life! Why had the Teacher from Nazareth chosen to visit him? True, he was wealthy, and had a splendid house, but he was a publican, despised and hated by all; he was not even honest in his business.

He would not hide the shameful truth; so as soon as Jesus had come, and the guests whom he had invited were assembled, Zacchæus stood up before them all, and said bravely, "Lord, behold, half of my goods I will give to the poor; and if I have taken any money by dishonest means, I will restore it fourfold."

What did it matter that the Jews outside were whispering with scorn that Jesus had gone to lodge with a sinner. Inside Zacchæus' home was great happiness, for he had confessed his sin, he had won forgiveness; and Jesus, by choosing to dine with a publican, had gained another human soul for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Hosanna to the Son of David!

Three of Jesus' best friends, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, lived at Bethany, a village among the hills between Jericho and Jerusalem.

Jesus used to visit them whenever he went to Jerusalem, and it was always Martha's great pleasure to prepare the best supper that she could for him; while Mary sat by him, listening as he talked to Lazarus.

Hundreds of travellers passed through the little village and camped on the hills round Jerusalem during the Passover week. Jesus decided to stay at Bethany, and go daily into Jerusalem.

Martha was very busy making preparations before he arrived, and invited many friends, including the twelve apostles, to come to supper.

Mary was feeling very troubled. She knew that the priests were jealous of Jesus, and she feared for his safety in Jerusalem. She believed that he knew the danger, and she admired the brave way in which he went to meet it.

What could she do to show her affection and respect for him? She waited until all the guests were assembled, reclining on long cushioned seats round the table, then she fetched a small bottle of precious scent called spikenard. She went quietly up to Jesus, and poured the whole contents of the bottle on to his feet, then wiped them dry with her long hair.

The sweet perfume filled all the house, and Jesus looked round at Mary, kneeling at his feet, and understood that she had done this to show him honour.

The guests understood too—all but one. Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve apostles, looked on with a frowning face, thinking of the cost of the scent. He loved money, and considered this a foolish waste.

"It might have been sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor," he muttered.

Jesus looked from Mary's anxious face to the gloomy apostle. "Let her alone," he said gently, "she has done a good deed. You have the poor always with you, and whenever you will you can do them good; but me you have not always."

The next day as Jesus and the apostles walked over the mount of Olives to Jerusalem, he sent two of them on ahead. "Go into the village over against you," he said. "As you enter it you will see a young ass tied, whereon never man yet sat; loose him, and bring him to me. If any one say 'Why do ye this?' say 'The Lord hath need of him,' and straightway they will send him hither."

The two apostles hurried on in great excitement. If the Master meant to ride into Jerusalem on an ass, that surely was a sign that he would proclaim himself king—did not prophets and kings of old ride on asses?

They found the ass tied up by a doorway, and having told the owner that the Lord needed it, they led it to Jesus. They threw their coats across its back, and Jesus sat on them and rode slowly forward.

When the crowd that was accompanying Jesus saw

him riding up towards the great city gate, they remembered the words written long ago by one of the prophets, and they began to shout, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

Many of the people ran on in front, and laid their coats upon the dusty road, to make it a pathway fit for a king; others pulled down branches from the trees, and laid them on the road. Some ran into the city and told the news that the king was coming, and a multitude of men, women, and children crowded out to meet him, waving palm branches, and shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

It was a triumphant procession which at last reached the Temple gates. Jesus dismounted, and walked into the great quiet building, followed by an excited crowd.

The children went on crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" and some disapproving priests approached Jesus. "Do you not hear what they are saying? Master, stop thy disciples!" they commanded.

No, Jesus would not stop the children. "Have you never read 'Out of the mouths of babes comes perfect praise'?" he asked, and the offended priests walked away, feeling more bitter than before against Jesus.

They wanted to take him by force, and condemn him to death, but they dared not touch him, as the multitudes were on his side. So from that day they went about Jerusalem, trying to turn the people against Jesus.

Looking into the Future

From the slopes of the Mount of Olives there was a fine view of the city of Jerusalem, with its strong brown walls, clusters of flat-roofed houses, and the shining Temple standing high in the midst. Jesus turned to look at it, as he walked to Bethany in the evening. He had been teaching in the Temple, and was glad to rest a while on the peaceful hillside.

"Behold the Temple, how it is adorned with goodly stones," said one of the apostles.

"I tell you truly," replied Jesus sadly, "the days come when there shall not be left one stone upon another."

The apostles were amazed. "Tell us, Master," they said, "when shall this be?"

"When nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom," answered Jesus; "then take heed to yourselves; you will be taken before kings and governors; you will be beaten and imprisoned; you will be hated by all men for my sake; but be not anxious, for the Holy Spirit will tell you what to say; and he who stands firm to the end shall be saved."

Then Jesus looked still farther into the future—to the far-off days when he would come to the world in great glory, surrounded by his angels, to judge all men.

"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, not even the angels of heaven," he said; "watch therefore, for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh."

Jesus told the apostles that God had given every one their special work to do, and their special gifts to use for the good of mankind. To help them to understand this he told them the story of a man who was going on a long journey, and called together his servants to give them last instructions.

To one servant he entrusted a large sum of money, five talents he called it; to another he gave two talents, and to another one talent; he told them to make the best use they could of the money while he was away.

The first man went into business, and by skilful buying and selling of goods he soon earned another five talents for his master. The second servant traded with his two talents and gained other two.

The third was a lazy man; he would not trouble to use his talent, he just buried it in the ground.

After a long time the master came home, and called his servants to give an account of the way in which they had used their talents.

The first servant said, "My lord, you gave me five talents, and lo, I have gained five more;" and the second servant showed the two talents which he had earned.

The master was pleased. "Well done, good and faithful servant," he said to each of them.

The third servant came forward, holding out the talent which he had just dug up. "My lord," he said, "I knew that you were a hard man, and I was afraid, and hid your talent in the earth—and lo, you have your own again."

"You wicked and idle servant," said the master,

"you knew that I was a hard man; you should have put my money in the bank, so that I might at least receive it back with interest."

The talent was then taken from the lazy servant, and given to him who had ten. So it will be at the great judgment day. Those who have used well the powers and skill which God has given them, will hear the gracious words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Those who are idle, and make no use of their talents, will find that they have lost them.

"In that day," continued Jesus, "the King shall say to the righteous souls, 'Come ye blessed of my Father, and enter into the kingdom prepared for you. For I was hungry and you gave me meat; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was sick and you visited me.' Then shall the righteous say, 'Lord, when saw we thee hungry or thirsty and fed thee; when saw we thee a stranger and took thee in; or sick and came unto thee?' And the King shall answer, 'I tell you truly, that when you did it to one of the humblest of my brethren, you did it unto me.'"

Jesus then parted from his apostles, and spent a quiet night in Bethany; and the next morning they were all in Jerusalem again at an early hour.

During the day Jesus moved through the crowded streets, or talked with groups of people in the Temple courts, and the priests and Pharisees dared not touch him openly. How could they find him alone in some secret place? Would one of his apostles help them?

The Last Supper

“Master, where wilt thou that we make ready for thee to eat the Passover?” inquired Peter and John on Thursday morning.

“Go into the city,” answered Jesus, “and when you see a man carrying a pitcher of water, follow him home; ask for the head of the house and say, ‘The Master saith, where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large upper room, furnished; there make ready.”

The two apostles hastened to Jerusalem, and soon saw among the women coming from the well with their water pots on their heads, the uncommon sight of a man carrying a pitcher of water. They followed him, and found that the master of the house where he entered was glad to lend his big upper room.

In the evening, when all Jews were assembling in families or parties to keep the Feast of the Passover, in memory of their forefathers’ great deliverance from Egypt, Jesus and the twelve apostles met in the upper room, and found all ready for them—the usual Passover supper of lamb roasted with bitter herbs, flat loaves of unleavened bread, and wine to drink.

Jesus took his place at the table, with John beside him; and after a little discussion as to who should have the best seats, the others also sat down,

No one but Jesus seemed to notice that Judas Iscariot sat silent and furtive, as though he had something to hide—he had indeed a terrible secret, for in his pocket were thirty silver coins, given him by the priests in return for his promise to lead them privately to Jesus.

There was a pitcher of water standing by the door of the upper room, also a bowl and a towel. When the apostles came in, they took off their sandals, but no one offered to take the part of a servant and wash the dusty feet.

Therefore, when all were seated, Jesus got up quietly, took the towel and bowl of water, and himself washed his disciples' feet. In shame they watched him doing the humble work which they had all been too proud to do. When he had finished, Jesus said, "Ye call me Master, and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet."

During the supper the twelve could see that Jesus was troubled, and presently he said, "Truly I say to you that one of you shall betray me to my enemies."

They were horrified at these words, and all asked him, "Lord, is it I?"

"It is one of you that eateth with me from the dish," he replied; then he turned to Judas Iscariot, and said, "What thou doest, do quickly," and Judas, seeing that Jesus knew his secret, got up and hurried from the room, out into the night.

The meal went on, and presently Jesus stood up and took a loaf of bread into his hands. He gave

thanks for it, then broke it, and put a piece into the hand of each apostle.

“Take and eat this,” he said; “for this is my body which is broken for you—do this in remembrance of me.”

Then Jesus took a cup of wine, and handed it to each in turn. “Drink ye all of this,” he said; “for this is my blood which is shed for you and for many—do this in remembrance of me.”

In solemn wonder the apostles heard these mysterious words, and took the bread and wine which Jesus had blessed. They began to feel afraid and very unhappy. They did not know that the days would come when they would meet together with joy to share the holy bread and wine in memory of their Master.

Jesus knew how his disciples felt, so he tried to cheer them. “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither be fearful,” he said; “ye believe in God, believe also in me; for I go to prepare a place for you. It is best for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you. When he, the Holy Spirit, is come, he will bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you. This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you.”

When Jesus had finished speaking, and the Last Supper was over, they all stood up and sang an evening hymn, then went out together into the quiet streets.

Before the Cock Crow

The full moon had risen, and shone brightly as Jesus and his apostles left the upper room, and walked across the brook Kedron to the quiet olive grove called Gethsemane, at the foot of the Mount of Olives.

On the way there Jesus said, "Behold, the hour is come that ye shall be scattered, and leave me alone—and yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me."

"Lord, I am ready to go with thee, to prison or to death!" cried Peter. "Though all desert thee, yet will not I!"

"I tell thee, Peter," said Jesus, "before the cock crow, thou shalt three times deny that thou knowest me."

"If I must die with thee, I will not deny thee!" insisted Peter, and so said they all.

"Sit ye here while I go yonder to pray," said Jesus to eight of the apostles, when they reached the garden of Gethsemane. He took with him Peter, James, and John, and went farther into the heavy shadows cast by the dark olive trees.

"Watch with me," he said, "and pray that ye fall not into temptation."

The three men were tired out with trouble and anxiety, and when they flung themselves on the ground, instead of asking God to give them the courage they would need, they fell fast asleep.

They did not see Jesus kneeling in very earnest prayer. They did not hear his brave words, "Father, not my will, but thine be done." They did not see an angel from heaven come to strengthen him.

Suddenly the peace of the shadowy grove was broken by tramping feet; flickering torches gleamed among the trees, and a band of soldiers marched into the garden.

The apostles sprang to their feet in fear, and gathered round Jesus. The torch light shone on the swords and breastplates of the soldiers, on the face of the man who led them—it was Judas Iscariot.

"Hail, Master!" he said, and gave Jesus a kiss of greeting. This was his sign to the soldiers, and at once they stepped forward with a rope to bind Jesus.

"Are you come out, as against a robber, with swords, to take me?" asked Jesus. "I was daily in the Temple, teaching, and ye took me not."

The horrified apostles saw their Master, with his hands bound, led away by the soldiers—and they fled from the garden in terror for their lives.

Peter soon turned to follow the crowd at a distance, and made his way to the high priest's house. He discovered that Jesus was being questioned by the priests there, so he ventured into the courtyard to wait.

There was a group of officers and servants gathered round a fire, for the night was cold. Peter joined them; he held out his hands to the blaze, and listened. They were talking about Jesus. Presently a maid-servant turned to Peter; she could see his face in the firelight. "This man was also with him," she said.

This frightened Peter; without stopping to think, he said quickly, "Woman, I know him not!" and he moved away from her towards the doorway.

In the porch was another group of servants, and one noticed Peter. "Did I not see thee in the garden with him?" he asked.

"I know not the man!" said Peter roughly.

The night wore on while the leading Jews and priests questioned Jesus, and tried to prove that he had done something worthy of death.

When Friday morning dawned, Peter was still waiting in the courtyard, and ventured to speak to some of the men grouped round the fire.

"You also are from Galilee with Jesus of Nazareth, your speech betrays you," said one man to Peter.

Angrily Peter replied, "I tell you, I know not the man of whom you speak!" and he was moving away, when he saw the great doors flung open, and the soldiers come out, leading Jesus.

From the distance came the sound of a cock crowing. Peter heard it—Jesus heard it too, and turned to look at Peter. Immediately Peter remembered Jesus' words, and his own reply, "If I must die with thee, I will not deny thee." What a coward he had been! He had been ashamed of his own beloved Master. He had denied his best friend. He rushed from the crowded courtyard, weeping bitterly.

No one had taken any notice of Judas Iscariot when his evil work was done. All night long he wandered miserably about, thinking of his Master in the hands of his enemies. He could see now what a dreadful

thing he had done. How he hated those thirty pieces of silver. He would make the priests take them back.

Early in the morning he hurried to the council chamber, and rushed into the presence of the chief priests.

"I have sinned, for I have betrayed a righteous man!" he cried.

"What is that to us?" replied the priests, and they scornfully refused to take back the money.

Black despair fell upon Judas. He threw down the silver coins on the paved floor, and rushed away feeling that life was no longer worth living, for he had betrayed the kindest Master that ever man had.



Good Friday

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor in Jerusalem, was called up early on Friday morning by a clamouring crowd of Jews, who had brought a prisoner for his judgment. The chief priests had decided that Jesus must die, but by the Roman law they were not allowed to condemn a man to death.

Pilate was surprised to see so calm and dignified a prisoner; how different from the rough and desperate men who were sometimes brought to him for punishment.

The excited priests on the palace steps began to accuse Jesus. "He stirs up the people by preaching throughout all Judea," cried one. "He says that he is the Messiah, a king," added another. "He calls himself the Son of God," said a third.

Pontius Pilate turned to Jesus. "Behold how many things they witness against you. Do you answer nothing?" he said.

Jesus had heard the witnesses mix truth with untruth, and he preferred to keep silence before them; so Pilate took him into the judgment hall and asked him privately, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight for me," replied Jesus.

"Are you a king then?" persisted Pilate.

"I am a king; and all who know the truth, know that my words are true," said Jesus.

Truth? Pilate did not know the truth, but he could see that this quiet, kingly man was no ordinary prisoner; he could not sentence this man to death.

Silence fell on the crowd when Pontius Pilate again appeared at the palace door.

"I find no fault in the man," he announced, "and it is the custom that I release one prisoner at the time of the Passover; shall I release unto you the King of the Jews?"

No, this would not please the jealous priests. "Not this man, but Barabbas!" they cried, and the crowd took up the cry, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" and Barabbas was a robber.

"What then shall I do with Jesus, who is called the Messiah?" asked Pilate.

"Let him be crucified!" shouted the people.

Pilate was unwilling to condemn an innocent man to death, and he turned back into the palace. There the soldiers had put a purple robe upon Jesus, and a crown of plaited thorns on his head, and were calling out with cruel, mocking laughter, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Pilate ordered them to lead Jesus out on to the palace steps, and he called to the crowd, "Behold your king." He hoped that the sight of Jesus, standing silent and unafraid before them, would melt their hard hearts. But no, the people, urged by the priests, cried out again and again, "Let him be crucified!"

"Shall I crucify your king?" asked Pilate.

"We have no king but Cæsar. If you release this

man you are no friend to Cæsar!" called out the crafty priests.

This mention of Cæsar alarmed Pontius Pilate; at all costs he wished to keep in favour with his Emperor. Therefore, knowing that he did a cowardly thing, but for fear of what the priests might report to Cæsar, he delivered up Jesus to be crucified.

On a hill called Calvary, outside the wall of Jerusalem, stood three dark crosses.

On two of them hung thieves, suffering punishment for their wickedness.

On the centre cross Jesus was fastened by great nails through his hands and feet. He who had done no wrong was suffering for the jealousy, hatred, and cowardice of wicked men.

Close to the cross stood Mary, his mother, and John, his beloved disciple, trying to comfort one another, as they waited by him with breaking hearts.

Near by, sitting motionless on horseback, was a Roman Centurion. It was his duty to watch the crucifixions. He had seen Jesus' calm courage, and heard with amazement his cry to God to forgive the ignorant soldiers who nailed him to the cross.

Standing around in little groups were the chief priests and some of the Jews. They came near the cross, and read the words which, by Pilate's order, had been fastened to it: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." There was no pity in their hearts as they looked at this King, whose throne was a wooden cross, and whose crown was made of thorns.

" If thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross!" they said; then turned away, scornfully shaking their heads and saying: " He saved others, himself he cannot save."

Presently heavy clouds came up and hid the sun; the earth trembled, and darkness veiled the hill of Calvary, so that the crowds who watched from afar returned to Jerusalem in great fear.

For three long hours the darkness lasted; and no one knows what Jesus suffered then. All the evil of the world had closed around him, and he felt the bitterness of separation from God. But the powers of evil, strong though they were, could not kill the brave Spirit of the Son of God.

At last, those watching by him in the darkness heard his joyful cry. " It is finished! Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!" He bowed his head, and his Spirit, freed from his body, went to join the waiting spirits in happy paradise.

" Truly, this man was a Son of God!" exclaimed the Centurion.

Another earthquake shook Jerusalem; and in the Temple, the heavy curtain which hung before the Holy Place was torn in two from top to bottom. This was a sign to all who could understand it, that Jesus, on the cross, had broken down the barrier of sin which had divided men from God.

Towards sunset a very sad little procession walked slowly down the hill of Calvary, to a garden in which was a rocky cave.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemas were carrying Jesus' body, carefully wrapped in fine white linen, and they laid it gently in the cave. Mary, Jesus' mother, with Mary Magdalen and some other faithful women from Galilee, followed into the garden, and took a last look at Jesus' body, lying so still and peaceful, before a heavy stone was rolled in front of the entrance to the rocky tomb.

With hearts full of sorrow the little party left the garden, to spend the next day, which was the Jews' Sabbath, preparing sweet spices to bring to the tomb on Sunday morning.

The chief priests then went to Pontius Pilate. "The tomb must be watched," they said, "lest his disciples steal him away, and say that he is risen from the dead."

Pilate allowed them to have a guard of soldiers, and they went away well satisfied that their wicked work was complete.

In the upper room in Jerusalem, Jesus' apostles were gathered, frightened and despairing. All the joy was gone out of their lives. Their Master, whom they loved, was dead, and buried in Joseph's tomb. Never were men more disappointed and miserable. This was the end of all their bright hopes.

But was it really the end?



“ MARY! ” SAID THE VOICE

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(See page 210)

Easter Day

Early on Sunday morning Mary Magdalen and the other women took the sweet-scented spices which they had prepared, and made their way through the quiet streets to Joseph's garden.

They remembered that a great stone had been rolled in front of the tomb, and that the Jews had sent soldiers to guard it day and night. Would they be allowed to enter the cave with their perfumes? wondered the women anxiously; would any one roll away the stone for them?

When they reached the garden they were surprised to see no soldiers there, and then to their horror they found that the stone was already rolled aside. Who had been to the tomb before them? Had someone come by night and taken Jesus' body away? They must run and tell the apostles!

They hastened to the upper room where the unhappy men were gathered, locked in for fear of the Jews. "They have taken away our Lord from the garden," cried the women, "and we know not where they have laid him!"

Peter and John sprang up at once. What did the women mean?—they must go and see for themselves.

Along the street and into the garden ran the two men, hardly knowing what they expected to find. John reached the tomb first, and peered into the

darkness. He could see the white linen gleaming there. Peter came up, and went boldly into the cave, followed by John. Together they gazed at the linen wrappings which lay flat and empty—Jesus' body was not there!

Filled with amazement, but scarcely understanding yet what had happened, the two men went back to their friends, not noticing that Mary Magdalen had followed them into the garden and was weeping bitterly there. She had wanted to do the last service she could for her Lord and Master, by putting sweet spices in his tomb; and now someone had taken his body away.

Presently, she turned to the door of the cave and looked in. To her surprise she saw two angels sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet, where Jesus' body had lain.

"Woman, why weepest thou?" they asked.

"Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him," she cried in great distress.

Then another voice behind her spoke. "Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?"

She turned quickly, and saw through her tears someone standing there; it must be a gardener, she thought, and answered at once: "Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have laid him."

"Mary!" said the voice—that wonderful voice which she never thought to hear again—Jesus' voice.

She threw herself on the ground at his feet with the joyful cry of "Master!" and she worshipped him.

Some of the apostles were still in the upper room when Mary Magdalen came into the midst of them, radiant with happiness. "I have seen the Lord!" she cried. But they would not share her joy—they could not believe that Jesus was alive—the news was too good to be true.

Late in the evening, into the upper room came two excited men, bringing great news.

They had been walking out to a village called Emmaus that afternoon, and talking sadly of Jesus and his death on the cross, when a stranger had joined them and walked with them. He had spoken so kindly, and comforted them so much, that they had asked him to supper with them at the inn at Emmaus.

During supper they had looked into the stranger's face, and as he broke the bread and handed it to them, the wonderful truth had come to them—it was Jesus himself! Why had they not known him when he walked with them along the way? Then as they gazed at him, he had disappeared from their sight.

The two men had hurried straight back to Jerusalem to tell the glad news—and still the apostles found it hard to believe.

Suddenly, as they talked, someone stood in the midst of them, and said: "Peace be unto you."

It was Jesus' voice and Jesus' face—but the apostles were afraid—it was too wonderful—it must be only a vision.

"Why are you troubled? See my hands and feet, that it is I myself!" and Jesus showed them the wounds which the nails had made on Good Friday. He then

Showed them how his words which he had spoken to them had come true—he had suffered and died, as the prophets had foretold, and on the third day he had risen again.

Then at last the apostles knew for certain that this was indeed Jesus, their own Master, who had risen from the dead.

The news soon spread through Jerusalem and reached the chief priests that Jesus was alive again, and they questioned the soldiers who had been on guard in Joseph's garden.

The soldiers said that an angel, as bright as the lightning, had come down from heaven and rolled away the stone from the tomb, and Jesus had come forth.

Then the priests paid the soldiers large sums of money to tell everyone that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body from the tomb during the night; and many Jews believed this lie. But the priests knew that all their wicked plans had failed—Jesus had broken the power of sin and death—he had risen, glorious and triumphant.

The Great Forty Days

As days went by, more and more of Jesus' friends saw him, and learnt the amazing truth that he had risen from the dead.

It happened that Thomas, one of the apostles, was not with the others when Jesus appeared to them; and he would not believe the good news. He would love to rejoice with the others, but he could not, until he had seen Jesus for himself, and seen the marks of the nails in his hands and feet.

After eight days, when Thomas was with the apostles in the upper room, with the door barred, as they still feared the Jews, Jesus came again.

"Peace be unto you," he said in greeting, then he turned to Thomas. "Behold my hands, and be not faithless, but believing," he said.

Thomas looked at the outstretched hands; he saw where the nails had been, and he cried out with joy: "My Lord and my God!"

"Thomas," said Jesus solemnly, "because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed. Happy are they who have not seen, and yet have believed."

Soon after this the apostles left Jerusalem and returned to Galilee, for Jesus had promised to meet them there. How peaceful it was by the lake, after all the sorrows and joys which had befallen them in Jerusalem.

"I go a-fishing," said Peter one evening, and his friends, glad to take up their usual work again, went with him.

All night long they rowed about the lake, but not a single fish was caught, and as dawn was breaking over the eastern hills, they decided to pull in the nets and go home.

When they drew near Capernaum, they saw someone standing on the shore, but could not see his face in the dim light. A voice called to them. "Have you anything to eat?" "No," they called in answer; and the voice said, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and ye shall find."

Obediently they let down the net, and soon it was so full of fish they were unable to pull it into the boat.

"It is the Lord!" exclaimed John, and Peter could not wait for the slowly moving boat, but leapt into the water and waded ashore. The other fishermen dragged their heavy net to land; there were 153 big fishes in it, and yet the net was not broken.

"Bring some of the fish which you have caught," said Jesus, and the men saw that he had a fire of charcoal burning, and a loaf of bread. Peter fetched some fish, and they cooked it over the fire.

At first the fishermen felt a little shy with Jesus, he seemed so glorious, so heavenly now—but they soon found that he was not really different, he was the same kind, loving Master that he had ever been—and a happy breakfast they had with him, sitting round the fire in the early morning sunshine.

"Peter, lovest thou me?" asked Jesus, when the meal was over.

"Yes, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee," replied Peter.

Again, and yet again, Jesus repeated the question, and Peter, who had denied his Master three times on Good Friday, now three times assured him of his love.

Jesus knew that Peter would not fail him again. "Feed my lambs, and tend my sheep," he said; and Peter knew that the care of all those ignorant people, whom Jesus had called "sheep without a shepherd" was entrusted to him. Peter must lead them to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus was not always with his apostles during the forty days which followed Easter Sunday; he appeared to them and talked with them at times; but he was teaching them to do without his visible presence.

Gradually they began to learn that Jesus was with them in Spirit when they could not see him. They remembered his words: "It is good for you that I go away;" and they began to look forward to the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Ascension of Jesus

Forty days had passed since Easter Sunday, and the apostles were again in Jerusalem, walking along the well-known road towards Bethany, with Jesus.

During many walks and quiet meetings with him, they had learnt what their work was to be in future. They who had been with Jesus, listening to his teaching and seeing his wonderful works, were to tell the world all that they had heard and seen.

This would be too hard a task for poor and unlearned men to attempt by themselves, but Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit to help them.

“Ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you,” said Jesus, “and ye shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

They walked on together and presently reached the top of the Mount of Olives. There Jesus gave them his last command. “Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,” he said, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And behold I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

Jesus then raised his hand to bless his apostles, and as he spoke, they saw a bright cloud come down from the sky, and take him from their sight.

As they stood gazing upwards they heard a voice

speaking, and saw two angels, dressed in white, standing by them. "Ye men of Galilee," said the angels, "why stand ye looking into Heaven? This same Jesus who has gone into Heaven, will come again, in like manner as ye have seen him go."

No, they must not remain there, looking up to the blue sky; they must go back to Jerusalem and wait for the promised Holy Spirit to come. They were not unhappy as they went down the Mount of Olives, and back to the upper room, for were not Jesus' last words ringing in their ears: "Behold, I am with you always," and they knew that this was true.

In ten days' time the Jews would hold the Feast of Pentecost, and Jerusalem would be filled with strangers and Jews from many countries, who had come to keep the feast.

The apostles did not mix with the people in the crowded streets during those days; they remained in the upper room, waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit and wondering what would be the sign of his coming. Jesus' mother was often with the apostles and other friends, both men and women, in that big room—it was a room full of memories of their Lord and Master, and they loved to talk of all that had happened there.

One day when about a hundred and twenty were gathered there, Peter, who had lately become the leader of the twelve, stood up in the midst—he had something to say.

"Brethren," he began, "it is right that we should choose a man from among those who have known and

followed Jesus, to take the place of the traitor Judas, who by his evil deed has been lost from the band of apostles."

All the company agreed with Peter, and they chose two men, Matthias and Barsabbas, who had known Jesus since the day of his baptism by John the Baptist, had heard his teaching, and had seen him after his resurrection from the dead. It was then arranged that they should draw lots, to decide which of these two men should become the twelfth apostle.

If only Jesus had been there to choose, as he had chosen the twelve three years ago! But was he not there? Yes, he had promised to be with them always—they would ask him to guide their choice.

So they prayed. "Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show of these two the one whom thou hast chosen to take the place from which Judas fell away."

The lots were cast, and when Matthias was chosen, he was welcomed into the band of twelve apostles, for all believed that Jesus himself had heard and answered their prayer.

The Day of Pentecost

Jews had scattered far over the world, and could be found in many countries, making their homes there, and speaking the language of the place in which they lived. But at the time of the great Jewish feasts large numbers of them came to their beloved city, Jerusalem. Therefore, at the Feast of Pentecost, the languages of Egypt, of Rome, of Mesopotamia, of Crete, and of Arabia could be heard in the narrow, crowded streets of Jerusalem, and in the Temple courts.

The sound of many voices rose to the upper room where the twelve apostles and their friends were gathered, talking together of Jesus and his wonderful resurrection, and wondering about the Holy Spirit who was to come.

Suddenly, louder than the noises of the busy street, came the sound of a rushing mighty wind, which filled all the house.

The men looked quickly from one to another—then they saw that over the head of everyone assembled there shone a little steady flame of light.

The great truth dawned on them at once. These were signs that the Holy Spirit had come at last. He appeared as a mighty wind to fill them with courage, and as a shining light to be their guide.

The wind died away, and the lights disappeared, but the apostles knew that the Holy Spirit was in

their hearts. They flung open the door, and hastened down to the street to proclaim the great news.

A crowd soon gathered round them, listening in amazement, for each stranger from Egypt, from Rome, from Mesopotamia, from Crete, or from Arabia could hear the apostles' words in his own language.

"Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans," they said, "and how hear we every man in our own language wherein we were born?"

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words!" cried Peter, standing up where he could be seen and heard by all. "Jesus of Nazareth, who did the wonderful works of God among you, and whom you knew to be a righteous man, you have crucified and slain. He both died and was buried, and you know his tomb. This same Jesus has God raised up; of which we all are witnesses. Now that he is ascended into heaven, he has sent his Holy Spirit to us, as he promised—and all shall know that this Jesus, whom you crucified, is both Lord and King."

"Brethren, what shall we do?" cried the astonished crowd.

"Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, every one of you," replied Peter, "and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit; for the promise is to you, and to your children."

Peter's earnest words touched the hearts of the people; they were full of shame for the wicked deed which the Jews had done—they would like to show their sorrow by being baptized, and joining the band of Jesus' disciples.

With great joy the apostles began to obey Jesus' last command, and to make disciples of the Jews from many countries, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Three thousand people were baptized that day; and so was started the great Universal Christian Church, of which all become members at their baptism.

Day by day these new disciples praised God in the Temple; they met together to hear the apostles' teaching; they blessed and shared the Holy Bread and Wine in memory of the Last Supper; they lived and prayed together as brothers and sisters; and daily more and more were added to their number.

It was wonderful to see the change which had come upon the twelve apostles. All their fear of the Jews had gone, they had become eloquent preachers, they could heal the sick—but they remained men with humble hearts, for they knew that this power which they had was not their own, it was the Holy Spirit dwelling within them..

The Lame Man at the Temple Gate

In Jerusalem lived a poor man who had been a cripple from his birth. He had never been able to work for his living, so each day his friends carried him to the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, and he lay there begging for money.

One day, soon after the Feast of Pentecost, Peter and John went up to the Temple at the hour of prayer. They saw the beggar lying there as usual by the gate called Beautiful, and when they heard his cry for alms, they stopped.

“Look on us,” said Peter.

The poor man looked up at them, full of expectation, and held out his hand.

“Silver and gold have I none,” said Peter, “but such as I have I give thee—in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!”

Peter helped the beggar to his feet; immediately his weak legs and ankles became strong, and he followed the apostles into the Temple, walking and leaping for joy, and praising God.

“Is not this the beggar who sat by the Beautiful Gate?” murmured the Jews to one another, when they saw him with Peter and John in the Temple. As soon as the time of prayer was over they followed the two

apostles across the court to the pillared gallery called Solomon's Porch, asking eagerly how they had cured the lame man.

"Ye men of Israel, why do you look on us, as though by our own power we had made this man walk," said Peter. "The God of our fathers has raised up Jesus, whom you crucified, whereof we are witnesses; and faith in his name has made this man strong. And now, brethren, repent, and be baptized, that your sin may be forgiven."

While Peter was speaking, some priests came into the porch; they were troubled to hear the name of Jesus, and to see how eagerly the people listened. They laid hands on the two apostles, and kept them in custody until the next day, when the council would meet.

The council chamber was full when Peter and John were led in by the Temple guard; and standing where he could be seen by all, was the beggar whom they had healed.

"By what power, or in what name, have you made that man walk?" demanded the high priest.

Standing before many of the very priests who had accused his Master a few weeks ago, Peter answered boldly, "Ye rulers of the people, if we this day are questioned about a good deed done to a lame man, be it known unto you all, that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, and whom God has raised up, even in his name does this man stand before you whole."

Many of the priests knew Peter to be one of the

ignorant men who had come with Jesus from Galilee, and they were amazed at the courage with which he spoke. They could not deny that these men had done a wonderful thing, for there was the beggar who had been lame, standing in the court, and they agreed that the apostles must be released. Before dismissing them, the priests gave them a solemn command, that they were to speak no more in the name of Jesus. The apostles were undaunted by this warning. "Whether it be right to obey you or to obey God, you can judge," they replied; "as for us, we cannot help speaking all that we have seen and heard."

Peter and John returned to their friends, and told all that had happened. The little company knelt down and prayed: "O Lord, thou who didst make the heaven and earth, grant unto thy servants to speak thy word with boldness, that signs and wonders may be done through the holy name of Jesus."

As they prayed they all knew that the Holy Spirit was among them; and they rose up full of courage to preach the Word of God, ready to face any danger for the sake of their Master.

Stephen the Deacon

Many of the Jews who were baptized by the apostles were wealthy men, and when they learned that some of their fellow-disciples had scarcely enough to eat, they brought money to Peter to be divided between their poorer brothers and sisters.

Seven wise men, who could be trusted to do the work fairly, were chosen to distribute food and money daily to those in need. One of these seven deacons was a young man named Stephen, who soon became well known in Jerusalem for his wonderful power of healing and of speech; it was plain that the Holy Spirit was working and speaking through him.

There was a certain party of Jews who became jealous of Stephen, and tried to get him into trouble with the priests. One day they seized him and took him before the council.

"This man speaks evil against Moses and against God," they said, "and he proclaims that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the Temple, and change the law which Moses gave us."

"Are these things true?" asked the high priest.

All that were in the council chamber gazed at the fearless young man who stood there alone to answer this serious accusation, which had been prepared by his enemies.

"Brethren and fathers, hearken!" said Stephen;

and with shining eyes he spoke long and eagerly. He reminded the council that God had chosen the Jewish people, and blessed them, since the time of their fore-father Abraham, that they might be a blessing to all mankind. He spoke of the tabernacle in which their fathers worshipped God in the wilderness, and of the temple which King Solomon had built; but he pointed out that God does not live only in temples made by men's hands, for the heavens and earth, which he has made, are his dwelling-place.

Very bitterly Stephen spoke of the way in which the Jews had disobeyed God and rejected his prophets. " You are as hard-hearted as your fathers," he exclaimed, " for you have murdered the Holy One of God, whom the prophets foretold!"

The priests were speechless with anger at these words. Stephen stood gazing upwards, as though he could see far beyond the council chamber. A glorious light shone on his face, and he cried, " Behold, I see the heavens opened, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God!"

The furious priests would hear no more. They sprang up and dragged Stephen roughly from the court, down the street, and outside the city wall.

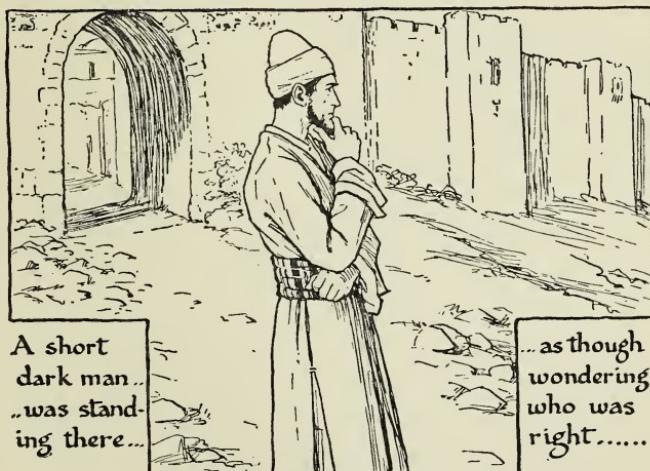
The witnesses, who had falsely accused Stephen, flung off their coats and began to throw great stones at him. Standing with his back to the city wall, facing the cruel crowd, he had no fear. Like Jesus on Good Friday, he prayed God to forgive his enemies. " Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," he said.

Presently he fell on his knees. " Lord Jesus, receive

my spirit," he prayed—and so, gladly and bravely, the first Christian martyr died for the sake of his Master.

The witnesses, satisfied with their evil work, went to get their coats. A short, dark man, in whose charge they had left them, was standing there with a thoughtful face, as though wondering who was right—those Jews who had thrown the stones, or that brave young deacon?

He watched some disciples gently and sadly carry Stephen's body away; and he decided that the stone-throwers were right. Something must be done to get rid of these followers of Jesus!



Philip the Deacon

The days which followed the stoning of Stephen were troubled ones for the disciples in Jerusalem. The priests determined to prevent the spread of the Christian faith by seeking out all who were followers of Jesus and sending them to prison.

How little they knew that this persecution was a means of spreading the faith still farther. Large numbers of disciples took refuge in neighbouring villages, and told the good news of Jesus' resurrection there; the deacons went out to more distant towns, teaching and making new disciples everywhere.

Philip, one of the deacons, was walking alone down the desert road which led from Jerusalem to Gaza, and southwards to the country of Ethiopia. He had been in Samaria, and had done wonderful work there, curing many who were sick and baptizing large numbers of people. One man who had watched with admiration all that was done by the power of God, offered a sum of money, saying, "Give me also this power." He then learned the glorious truth that no one can buy the gifts of God—they are given freely to those who ask for them. Now Philip scarcely knew why he had chosen this lonely road—and yet he felt that the Holy Spirit had led him there for some purpose.

Presently he heard the sound of galloping horses;



ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

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he turned and saw a chariot coming swiftly towards him. There was a black man, splendidly dressed, sitting in it, and reading from a parchment scroll.

Philip ran beside the chariot. "Do you understand what you are reading?" he cried.

The black man ordered his driver to stop the horses at once. "How can I understand, unless someone shall help me?" he replied; and he begged Philip to drive with him.

Philip stepped up into the chariot, the horses started, and as they drove he soon discovered that the black man was a servant of Candace, the queen of Ethiopia. He held a most important position in her household, for he had the care of all her treasure. He had been to Jerusalem to worship God in the temple; and this roll which he had bought there, was the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Philip and the Ethiopian bent together over the writing, and read the words in which the prophet foretold the coming of a great King who would suffer and die for his people.

"I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet?" asked the black man.

This was Philip's chance—he started from the beginning and told the wonderful story of Jesus, right to the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the baptizing of new disciples.

On and on went the chariot, until presently the road ran beside a stream of water.

"Behold, here is water!" exclaimed the Ethiopian; "what hinders me from being baptized?"

"If you believe with all your heart, you may," replied Philip.

"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," said the Ethiopian; so the chariot was stopped, and they went down together into the stream.

The water was poured over the Ethiopian's black head, and Philip baptized the first black disciple "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit".

After the baptism the Ethiopian returned to his chariot with great happiness in his heart, and drove rapidly on his way.

Philip, too, was glad—he knew now why the Holy Spirit had called him to that lonely road; and he guessed that the first Ethiopian Christian would be sure to spread the good news of Jesus in the court of Queen Candace.



The Conversion of Saul

A short, dark man was going from house to house in Jerusalem, questioning the people, finding out which were baptized, commanding them to give up their Christian faith, and if they refused, sending them to prison.

Was it the same man who had watched in silence, and consented to the stoning of Stephen the deacon? Yes, it was the same; and since that day he had helped the priests with all his might in their cruel persecution of the followers of Jesus.

He was Saul of Tarsus, a learned Pharisee, who studied the law of Moses and kept all the rules of the Jewish religion. He did not believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah; it made him angry to see the happy disciples rejoicing over the resurrection of their Master; and when he heard that the Christian faith was spreading beyond Jerusalem, he set off for Damascus, to seek out the disciples there, and send them bound to Jerusalem.

On the long journey northwards Saul was thinking deeply. He remembered again the radiant face of the martyr Stephen, and the joyful courage of all the Christian people, who actually seemed glad to suffer imprisonment or death rather than give up their faith.

At last the journey was nearly over; Saul and the

little band of men who travelled with him could see the city wall of Damascus before them.

Suddenly a great light from heaven, brighter than the midday sun, shone round them, and, for a moment, Saul saw a figure standing in the light; then he hid his face and fell to the ground.

“Saul, Saul!” said a voice, “why do you persecute me?”

“Who are you, Lord?” asked Saul.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” replied the voice; and Saul knew at once that the Christians were right, Jesus was alive; it was Jesus whom he had seen in that flash of glory.

“What shall I do, Lord?” asked Saul at last.

“Arise, and go into Damascus,” came the answer, “and you shall be told what to do.”

Slowly Saul rose to his feet; he opened his eyes, but he could not see—the brilliant light had blinded him.

He held out his hands to his companions, who were watching him in surprise; they had seen the light, but had heard no voice. They took his hands and led him into the city, to the house where he was to lodge.

For three days Saul remained in the house; he would neither eat nor drink, he only wished to think and pray, for all his life was changed now. He had seen Jesus—he believed in Jesus—and he knew that in hurting Jesus’ followers he had hurt Jesus himself. What could he do to make up for all the sorrow he had caused?

On the third day one of the disciples who lived in Damascus came to the house inquiring for one Saul of Tarsus. Saul heard footsteps in his room, felt a kind hand laid upon his shoulder, and heard a friendly voice saying, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me, that you may receive your sight."

Saul rose from his knees, opened his eyes, and to his joy he could see again! He was baptized that very day, and went with his new friend to join the little company of Damascus disciples, who gave him a brotherly welcome.

There were certain strict Jews in Damascus who were angry when they heard Saul proclaiming his belief in Jesus, and they planned to kill him. Their plot was discovered by the disciples, who urged Saul to leave Damascus at once. The city gates were guarded, so with a basket and a strong rope they lowered him from the city wall by night, and he reached Jerusalem in safety.

There Saul had a great disappointment, for the disciples were afraid of him; in vain he told them of his vision of Jesus on the road, and of his baptism at Damascus. They thought he was playing a cruel trick on them, and would send them all to prison.

At last one of the disciples named Barnabas determined to trust him, and held out a friendly hand to him. From that day he was welcomed by all as a fellow-Christian.

Dorcas

When Saul of Tarsus became a disciple of Jesus, the persecution of the Christians stopped for a time. Peter had stayed in Jerusalem to comfort and encourage the disciples through those troubled days; but when all was peaceful again, he set off to visit the new Christians throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.

In many towns he found a small Christian congregation established; the deacons had baptized the people; and Peter laid his hands on them and prayed for them, so that they might receive the Holy Spirit, and be confirmed in the faith.

During his journey Peter came to Lydda, and the disciples there took him to see a man who was ill with the palsy. Peter was sorry for the man, who had lain on that low bed for eight years. "Jesus Christ healeth thee," he said; "arise, and make thy bed;" and the man rose up, well and strong.

When the people of Lydda heard of the recovery of the man who had been ill so long, they all believed in the power of Jesus, and joined the Christian Church. The fame of the miracle spread beyond Lydda to the villages around, and to the seaside town of Joppa.

One day two men from Joppa came in haste to Lydda, asking for Peter. They told him that there was great trouble in their town. "Come with us without delay," they entreated.

Peter went immediately with the men, who told him that all Joppa was filled with sorrow over the death of a disciple named Dorcas. The poor people of Joppa loved her; she had spent her time and her money for them; everyone would miss so kind a friend.

When they reached the house, Peter went up to the room where the body of Dorcas lay. He was surrounded at once by a throng of women, who showed him the clothes which Dorcas had made for them, and wept to think that she would make no more.

Peter sent the weeping women from the room, and when all was quiet he knelt beside the bed. He prayed to God that the spirit of Dorcas might come back to her; then he stood up and said, "Dorcas, arise."

Dorcas opened her eyes; and when she saw Peter standing by her, she sat up. Peter took her hand to help her from her bed, and he went to the door to call the women who were waiting so anxiously outside. They ran into the room, and saw their beloved Dorcas, alive and well!

After this Peter remained in Joppa many days, teaching and baptizing the new disciples who joined the Church when they heard of this wonderful miracle which was done by the power of Jesus.

Peter in Prison

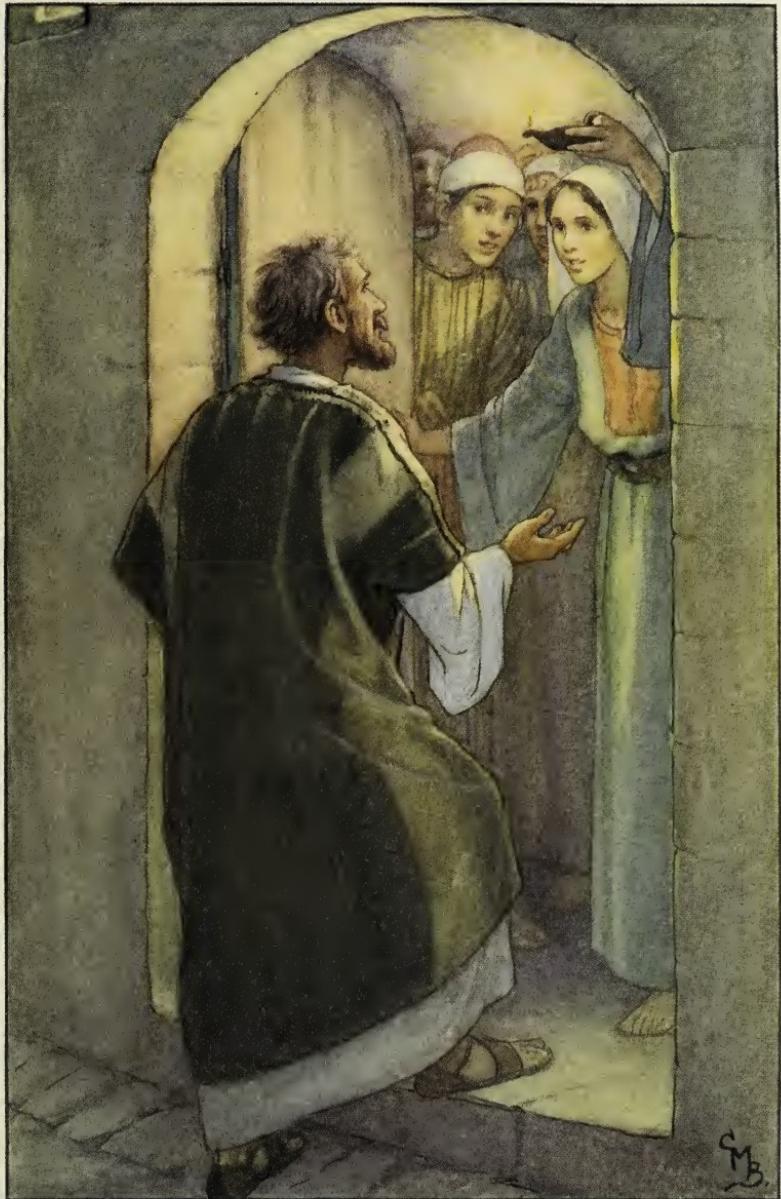
The Christians in Jerusalem were not left in peace for very long, and it was King Herod who started the persecution again. He did not himself care whether the Christian faith was spreading or not, but, hoping to please his people, he sent out soldiers to seek for the leaders of the Church; and they captured James, the brother of John.

James was killed in the prison; and when Herod saw that the Jewish leaders approved of this cruel deed, he sent out his men to seize Peter also.

A few days before the Feast of the Passover the soldiers captured Peter; they put him into prison, where Herod meant to keep him, closely guarded, until the feast was over.

For days Peter lay in the dark prison cell, chained to two rough Roman soldiers. He was perfectly calm and happy; he knew that whatever happened would be for the best; if he were rescued it would show him that God had still some work for him to do in the world; if he were condemned to die—had not Jesus taken all fear from death? And he knew that his friends were praying that his courage should not fail.

One night, when all was quiet in the prison—the iron gates locked, the heavy outer and inner doors bolted and guarded by drowsy soldiers, and Peter's



RHODA OPENED THE DOOR TO PETER

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two guards sleeping heavily beside him—Peter himself was wakened by a touch on his side. He opened his eyes; his cell was full of light, and a voice said, “Rise up quickly.”

Was this a dream, or was it an angel standing there? Peter sat up, the chains on his wrists came unfastened and fell off, but the guards did not stir.

“Bind on your sandals,” said the visitor, “put on your coat, and follow me.”

Obediently Peter dressed himself, and still believing that it was a dream, he followed the bright figure through the open door. They walked quietly along the stone passages, through inner and outer doors which swung open for them, past the sleeping guards, across the courtyard to the iron gates. These also opened for them; the angel guide led on to the end of the street, and then disappeared.

Peter looked about him—no, this was not a dream—he could feel the night air blowing on his face, he could see the starry sky above him; he was alone, and free, in the well-known street.

“Now I know of a truth that the Lord has sent his angel, and saved me from the hand of Herod,” he said to himself; and he stood still to consider where he should go. He would be sure to find some of the disciples gathered in the house of Mary, the mother of Mark. Her upper room was often used as a meeting-place; he would go there.

Peter reached the house, and saw by a little light in an upstairs window that someone was awake, so he knocked at the door in the courtyard wall.

He heard footsteps cross the yard, and the voice of Rhoda, the maid, asking, "Who is there?"

"It is I, Peter," he replied; and to his surprise the gate was not opened; he heard the footsteps running back to the house.

Peter knocked again—he went on knocking—until he heard many people crossing the courtyard, and voices saying, "You must be mad! It cannot be Peter—it is his angel!" Then the gate was unbolted and flung open.

By the light of a little lamp which Rhoda held up, Peter could see the astonished faces of his friends peering out at him. He would not let them question him until the gate was bolted again, and they were all in the upper room together. Then he told them the wonderful story of his deliverance from prison, and they praised God for this answer to the prayers which they had prayed night and day for Peter.

It was not safe for Peter to remain there—he must leave Jerusalem before daybreak. He knew that a search would be made for him, but no one had seen him leave his cell, so Herod would never know how his prisoner had escaped.

Paul at Lystra

Saul of Tarsus, who was called by his Roman name of Paul after his baptism, worked as hard for the Church as he had once worked against it. For a year he and his friend Barnabas lived in the great heathen city of Antioch in Syria, preaching and baptizing, until large numbers of both Jews and Gentiles had joined the Christian Church.

Paul was happy in his work at Antioch, but he did not forget that there were other towns and cities in which the Gospel of Jesus had not yet been preached. He believed that the Holy Spirit was calling him to carry the good news far and wide. Therefore, accompanied by Barnabas, and cheered by the prayers and good wishes of the Antioch Christians, Paul started on his first missionary journey.

From place to place went the two messengers of the Gospel; speaking first to the Jews in their synagogues on the Sabbath day, then preaching in the streets and market-places to the Greeks and other foreigners, for Paul knew that Jesus had come to be “a light to lighten the Gentiles”.

Wherever Paul went great multitudes of Jews and Gentiles were attracted by his eloquent preaching, and came to be baptized; until the strict Jews became jealous of his success, and at Iconium they drove him out of their city with stones.

Paul and Barnabas fled from Iconium to the neighbouring town of Lystra, a heathen town, where the people worshipped the god Jupiter. A crowd gathered in the centre of the town when Paul stood up to speak; and among them lay a poor crippled man, gazing up at him from a mat. Paul finished his speech, then went to the cripple and said, aloud, so that everyone could hear, “Stand upright on thy feet!”

The man, who had never walked, leapt from his mat, while the crowd grew wild with excitement. Never had they seen such a wonderful thing! These must be the gods come down to earth in the likeness of men! The tall handsome one was Jupiter himself, and the short one was Mercury, the spokesman of the gods!

Paul and Barnabas were trying to calm the excited people, when they saw some men dressed like priests coming into the city gate leading white oxen, and carrying garlands of flowers. Paul understood what this meant—the heathen priests were going to offer a sacrifice to Barnabas, because they had mistaken him for their god Jupiter!

This must be stopped at once!

“Sirs, why do you this thing?” he cried. “We are only men like yourselves; we have come here to bring you good news of the true God who made heaven and earth!” The crowd was scarcely persuaded that Paul and Barnabas were not gods, when some evil-looking Jews entered the city; they had followed the apostles from Iconium, and began to urge the people of Lystra to drive these strange preachers away.

Soon great stones were flying through the air, and with a shout of triumph the people saw Paul fall to the ground. They dragged him outside the city wall, believing him to be dead.

The multitude soon melted away, and when all was quiet, Timothy, a Lystra boy, crept out of the gate—he had not joined the angry crowd, for his mother was a Jewess who had taught him to worship God, and he wanted one more look at the face of that bold preacher who had cured the crippled man.

There he lay on the ground, with his friend kneeling beside him. Timothy watched from a distance, and soon to his surprise and joy he saw that the preacher was not dead—he was getting up—and presently walked away, with the help of his strong companion.

Would Timothy ever see him again? It was hardly likely he would ever come back to Lystra, after the way he had been treated. But Timothy could not forget Paul's earnest face. That was the kind of man he admired; he would like to be his friend and follow him all over the world.

Paul at Philippi

"Let us return now and visit the brethren in every city wherein we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they fare," said Paul to his friend Barnabas, after some months' stay at Antioch.

It was agreed that Barnabas should take with him his young cousin Mark from Jerusalem, and go in one direction; Paul would go in another with Silas for his companion. Paul, therefore, parted again from his many friends in Antioch, and started upon his second missionary journey.

When he reached Lystra, Paul was greeted by Timothy, who had been hoping and longing for his return. Paul was very much attracted to the eager lad; and when the missionaries left Lystra to continue their journey, they were accompanied by Timothy.

The three friends presently arrived at the seaside town of Troas, and there they were joined by Luke, a doctor, who decided to travel with them. Luke was a writer as well as a doctor; so besides looking after Paul when he fell ill, and being a good friend to him at all times, he kept a diary during the journeys, which afterwards became part of the book called *Acts of the Apostles*.

At Troas, Paul stood on the shore and gazed across the sea towards the east; he knew that many countries and cities belonging to the great Roman Empire lay

there. How he longed to preach the Gospel of Jesus in Macedonia, in Greece, and in mighty Rome itself.

Where should he go next? His mind was soon made up; the party of four took ship and sailed to Philippi, a city of Macedonia.

Philippi was a heathen city, there was no synagogue in which to worship God, and all kinds of business was carried on as usual during the Sabbath day. Only a little group of Jewish women, gathered by the riverside for prayer, were trying to keep the seventh day holy. These women welcomed Paul and his companions into their midst, and listened gladly to the story of Jesus.

One of the women was Lydia, who had a shop in Philippi, and sold cloth dyed with purple dye from her native town of Thyatira. She wished to be baptized at once, and soon her whole household became Christians also. She persuaded the four missionaries to make her house their home while they remained in Philippi, and she did everything possible for their comfort.

Day by day men and women were baptized, and met together on the first day of the week to pray, and to learn more about the Christian faith, until some of the towns-folk began to say to one another, "These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city," and they found an excuse to arrest Paul and Silas, and drag them before the rulers of the city.

To satisfy the people, the rulers gave orders that Paul and Silas should be beaten with rods, and cast into prison.

The jailer locked his prisoners into a small, dark

cell, and went to his house for the night. It did not matter to him that they would get no rest, with their feet made fast in the stocks, and their backs sore from the beating. He did not hear them at midnight singing hymns of praise to God—a joyful sound which had never been heard in that gloomy building, and which cheered the miserable prisoners who listened from their cells.

A rumbling sound like thunder suddenly roused the jailer from his sleep; the foundations of the prison were shaking, and the doors were flung wide open!

The jailer rushed in a panic down the stone passage leading to the cells. If those doors were open, and the prisoners escaped, he would be blamed for it. It were better to kill himself at once, and he drew his sword as he ran.

“Do yourself no harm, we are all here!” cried Paul from his cell—and sure enough, the prisoners were all there, though their doors were open and their chains were loosed.

The jailer saw that this was the work of his Jewish prisoners, and he flung himself at their feet, crying, “Sirs, what can I do to be saved?”

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and all your household,” replied Paul.

Full of gratitude, the jailer took Paul and Silas to his house; he washed their wounds, and gave them food; and in the morning both he and his family were baptized.

When the rulers of Philippi heard of the events of

the night, they sent officers to release Paul and Silas from prison, and to entreat them to leave the city.

The Christians in Philippi could not well be left without a teacher, so Luke remained with them, while Paul, Silas, and Timothy went on to Thessalonica. There Paul's preaching was well received, and numbers of Greeks learned to believe in Jesus and his resurrection. As in the city of Lystra, it was the Jews who made trouble; they gathered round the house of Jason where Paul lodged, shouting for him to come out to them. When Jason and his friends appeared at the door, the Jews seized them and dragged them before the rulers of the city. "These are the men who are turning the world upside down!" cried the Jews, "and they have proclaimed as king not Caesar, but Jesus!" The rulers were troubled—but as Paul himself was not present to reply to this accusation, they released Jason, and were glad to hear the next day that the apostle had secretly left the city.

Paul never forgot Lydia, the jailer, Jason, and his many friends in Philippi and Thessalonica; the loving letters which he wrote to them were read over and over again, and so carefully were they preserved that copies of them can now be read by all who have a Bible.

Paul in the Greek Cities

— Into the famous city of Athens walked Paul, lonely and unknown. He had left his friends in Macedonia, they would join him later. By himself he would proclaim the Gospel of Jesus in this beautiful heathen city, the pride and glory of the Greeks.

Unnoticed he walked through the wide streets, and saw the stately temples, decorated with statues of the heathen gods. How splendid it would be if the Greeks would turn to the true God, and use their artistic skill in his honour!

Presently, Paul noticed an altar with the words “To the Unknown God”. He must remember this—it would help him to begin his preaching, for surely the people of Athens would be glad to hear about the God who was yet unknown to them.

Paul made his way to the market-place where the men and women of Athens spent much of their time, talking over the news of the day. Some of them spoke to Paul, and when they heard that he was a teacher, they said: “Come up to Mars Hill, where the rulers of Athens meet; we would know what this new teaching is.”

Gladly Paul went with them, and stood among the learned company of Greeks. “Men of Athens, I know that you are interested in religion, for I have seen the many temples in your city,” he began; “I

saw also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the Unknown God’, and it is of him that I have come to tell you. The God who made the world and all that is therein lives not in temples made with hands. He gives life to all things; and men of every nation seek after him to find him, yet he is not far from each one of us.’

While he spoke Paul watched his listeners carefully. Their handsome faces were full of attention, so he went on to tell of Jesus, his death on the cross, and his rising again.

Resurrection from the dead? They had never heard of such a thing! They could not listen any more to a man who talked like this! Some laughed scornfully; others moved away saying, “Tell us the rest another time!” and Paul saw that the glorious Gospel, which was received so gladly by humble men and women, was treated as foolishness by these clever Greeks.

He would joyfully bear imprisonment, stoning, beating—but he could not face this mocking laughter, so he slipped quietly away through the crowd.

With a sad heart Paul left Athens, and entered the big gay city of Corinth. He must find some work to do here, for his store of money was low, and he would never depend on the kindness of friends for his food and lodging.

He passed through the wide streets, and found in a quiet road a tent-maker’s little shop. Paul had learnt tent-making when he was a boy, so he entered the shop to ask for work.

Aquila the tent-maker, and his wife Priscilla, were Jews, and they were glad to welcome and befriend a fellow-countryman. Paul lodged at the little shop, and while he worked at the tent cloth, he taught Aquila and Priscilla the Christian faith.

When Silas and Timothy reached Corinth, seeking for Paul, they found him happy in his work with Aquila and Priscilla, who had become Christians; and the three missionaries remained there for a year and six months teaching the Jews and Greeks, and establishing a Christian Church there.

But Paul was not yet satisfied with his work—he must spread the Gospel farther still—he could not rest until he had preached the Good News in Rome. Before this, however, he would go back to Jerusalem.

He visited many cities on his return journey, and when he reached Cæsarea he was met by a man called Agabus who was able to look into the future. Agabus took Paul's girdle from his waist and bound his own hands together with it. "Thus saith the Holy Spirit," he announced, "so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this girdle." Paul's friends were troubled by this prophecy, and begged him with tears not to go to Jerusalem. "Why do you weep and break my heart?" said Paul. "I am ready, not only to be bound, but to die for the name of the Lord Jesus."

A Prisoner in Rome

Paul was in Jerusalem once more.

What news he had for the apostles of his missionary journeys! He told of the Christian Churches in Antioch, in Ephesus, in Philippi, in Corinth. He told of the new friends he had made, of Lydia the seller of purple dyes, and of the jailer, at Philippi; of Luke the good doctor, who was writing a book about their travels; of Timothy the Lystra boy, who was likely to become a great man in the Church; of Aquila and Priscilla the tent-makers, who were spreading the good news among their friends; and of many more whose names have now been forgotten who would rather die than give up their Christian faith.

The apostles rejoiced at the news, but they had a warning for Paul. "Many of the strict Jews are angry with you," they said, "because you have not taught the Gentile Christians to obey all the rules of the Jewish religion before they can enter our Temple."

Paul soon noticed that these Jews were watching him suspiciously as he went about Jerusalem, and one day he was surrounded by an excited crowd of them, shouting: "This is the man who teaches people everywhere to forsake the law of Moses, and brings Greeks into our holy Temple!"

Roman soldiers quickly came to stop the uproar, and they rescued Paul, who was in danger of being

killed by the furious mob. The Jews grew the more angry when Paul was taken from them, and forty of them agreed to touch neither meat nor drink until they had taken Paul's life.

This plan reached the ears of the chief Roman officer, so he ordered that an escort of 470 soldiers and two officers should take Paul secretly, by night, to the Roman governor at Cæsarea.

For two long years Paul was kept a prisoner in Cæsarea; a sad waste of time it seemed to him. Would he ever reach Rome? Would he ever preach the Gospel again?

There was little for Luke to write in his diary about this weary time; but he was preparing another book, a life of Jesus, which is called in our Bible "The Gospel according to St. Luke". The progress of this book, and visits from Luke and other friends, were cheering to Paul in his imprisonment.

At last Festus, the Roman governor, sent for Paul. "Will you go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged?" he asked.

"To the Jews I have done no wrong," replied Paul; "but if I have done anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die. I appeal unto Cæsar."

"You have appealed to Cæsar, to Cæsar you shall go," said Festus.

Every prisoner had a right to appeal to Cæsar, and the request could not be refused; so it was soon arranged for Paul, with some other prisoners, all in chains, under the care of a centurion, to be put on board a ship sailing to Italy.

The faithful Luke would not desert his friend, but took a passage on the same ship, and accompanied him on the journey.

What a long adventurous journey it was. For two weeks the ship was tossed and driven to and fro by a terrible storm; for three months the whole company, passengers and crew, were stranded on the little island now called Malta, while their ship was dashed to pieces on the rocks.

They were picked up at last by another ship laden with corn, and a few days later Paul had his first sight of the fair land of Italy.

His wish was granted—he was going to Rome—but how could he, a prisoner in chains, preach the Gospel, and win men and women for the Kingdom of God?

The centurion brought so good a report of his prisoner that Paul was not kept in the Roman dungeon; he was allowed to hire a lodging in the city; but he had no freedom, for he was chained day and night to a Roman soldier.

In spite of this the Christian faith began to spread in Rome; and the place where the new disciples met for prayer and friendly talk was Paul's little room.

Luke was often there, and Timothy, and sometimes a traveller bringing news from cities in which Paul had preached the Gospel. At such times Timothy would spend evenings with Paul, writing for him, by the light of a small oil lamp, long letters full of instruction and cheerful greeting to send back to the Christians of Ephesus or Philippi.

Was it the sight of that Roman soldier standing on guard in his helmet and breastplate which made Paul think of the armour which a Christian needs in his fight against sin? "Put on the whole armour of God," he wrote to the Christians at Ephesus, "that you may be able to withstand in the evil day. Put on the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation; take also the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

At last there came a sad and lonely time for Paul. The Roman Emperor hated the Christians, and many of them fled from Rome to save their lives; only Luke remained of all Paul's old friends.

Paul knew then that his work on earth was nearly ended; he would soon be condemned to death for his faith. He sent a last letter to Timothy, who had been made head of the Church in Ephesus. "I have fought a good fight," he wrote. "I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but to all them that have loved his appearing."

A Vision of Heaven

On the little lonely island of Patmos sat an old, old man, gazing across the sea towards the town of Ephesus, where he had lived and worked for many years.

His dim old eyes scarcely saw the waves dashing upon the rocks at his feet, or the distant coast-line of Asia; his thoughts were away in the past: he was living again in those far-off days when he had followed his Master through Galilee and Judea.

How many things he could remember! Wonderful miracles of healing; thrilling stories each with a heavenly meaning for those who could understand; the solemn Last Supper in the upper room at Jerusalem; the sadness of Good Friday; the happiness of Easter Day; this and much more could the old man recall, for he was John, the beloved disciple.

Memories crowded upon him of the busy days after the Feast of Pentecost; of the spreading of the Gospel; of the cruel persecution of the new Christian Church; of the destruction of Jerusalem and its beautiful Temple, bringing back to his mind Jesus' own words, "the days shall come when there shall not be left one stone upon another".

James, Peter, Andrew, Paul, and many others had bravely and gladly died a martyr's death; he, John, alone was left of that little band of apostles. He had

preached the good news in Jerusalem and in Ephesus; he had written a book about Jesus, called "The Gospel according to St. John", and now in his old age he was banished to this island by the Roman Emperor.

Yes, the glory of Jerusalem was past and gone for ever; but John believed that God was preparing a still more glorious home, not for Jews only, but for all mankind.

While such thoughts filled the old man's mind, God opened his eyes and showed him the most beautiful vision that man has ever seen of the Heavenly City, the new Jerusalem, where Jesus reigns, and where he will welcome all his faithful people.

A door in heaven seemed to open, and John heard a voice like the sound of a trumpet saying: "Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which shall come to pass hereafter."

Then a glorious view opened before him. There was the throne of God, surrounded by countless thousands of angels; and before the throne was Jesus, the Lamb of God, who had died for the sins of the world, and was alive for evermore.

"Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive honour and glory and blessing!" sang the angels; and the answer echoed from all over the world, "Unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, be blessing, and honour, and glory, and dominion, for ever and ever!"

Then appeared a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation upon the earth,

standing before the throne, dressed in white robes, with palms of victory in their hands.

“Salvation unto our God who sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb!” they cried; and the whole great company, and all the angels, fell on their faces before the throne, worshipping their God.

“Who are these, which are arrayed in white robes?” asked an angel; and John replied, “My lord, thou knowest.”

“These are they which have come through great tribulation,” said the angel; “therefore are they before the throne of God, to serve him day and night. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, for the Lamb shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them unto the waters of life. And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

While John gazed at this amazing scene, the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, came down from heaven in all her glory; and a great voice said: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men. He shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people; and death shall be no more, neither crying nor pain. Write, for these words are faithful and true.”

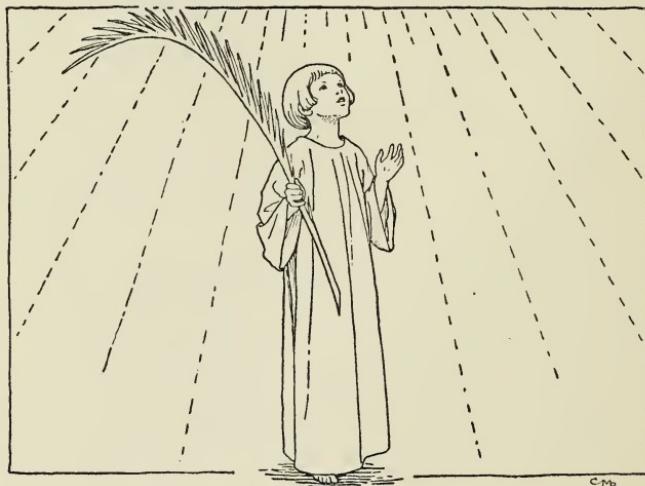
When at last the splendid vision faded, John tried to write the wondrous things which he had seen—tried to describe the glory of the Heavenly City.

“I saw no temple there,” he wrote, “for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple thereof. The city hath no need of the sun, for the glory of God did lighten it; all nations shall walk in the light, and shall do him service; they shall

see his face, and shall reign with him for ever and ever."

John wrote the story of his vision in the most beautiful words he could think of, but we know that the Heavenly Home which God has made for all who love him, is far more lovely than any words can tell.

Thousands of years have passed since the beginning, when God made the heavens and the earth—thousands more years may pass before we see the Heavenly City. We cannot tell what the joys and the beauties of that City will be, but we know that the Lamb who is on the throne will be the same Jesus who lived, and loved, and died, and rose again for us—Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.



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